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THE CHAPERON

C N AND A M
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THE CHAUFFEUR AND
THE CHAPERON

This One

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C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

My Friend the Chauffeur, *Lady Betty Across the Water*,
Rosemary in Search of a Father, *Princess Virginia*,
The Car of Destiny, *The Princess Passes*,
The Lightning Conductor

She absentmindedly dropped in three, while talking to Starr

[Page 146]

THE CHAUFFEUR AND THE CHAPERON

BY

C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KARL ANDERSON

NEW YORK
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TO

MR. G. VAN DER POT

PRESIDENT OF THE ROTTERDAM SAILING AND ROWING CLUB
WHOSE KIND AND NEVER-FAILING HELP ADDED
TENFOLD TO THE PLEASURES OF OUR
VOYAGE THROUGH DELIGHTFUL
DUTCH WATERWAYS
WE DEDICATE

THE STORY OF THE TOUR

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THE CHAUFFEUR AND
THE CHAPERON

NELL VAN BUREN'S POINT OF VIEW

I

SOMETIMES I think that having a bath is the nicest part of the day, especially if you take too long over it, when you ought to be hurrying.

Phyllis and I (Phil is my stepsister, though she is the most English creature alive) have no proper bath-room in our flat. What can you expect for forty pounds a year, even at Clapham? But we have a fitted-up arrangement in the box-room, and it has never exploded yet. Phyllis allows herself ten minutes for her bath every morning, just as she allows herself five minutes for her prayers, six to do her hair, and four for everything else, except when she wears laced-up boots; but then, she has principles, and I have none; at least, I have no maxims. And this morning, just because there were lots of things to do, I was luxuriating in the tub, thinking cool, delicious thoughts.

As a general rule, when you paint glorious pictures for yourself of your future as you would like it to be, it clouds your existence with gray afterwards, because the reality is duller by contrast; but it was different this morning. I had stopped awake all night thinking the same things, and I was no more tired of the thoughts now than when I first began.

I lay with my eyes shut, sniffing Eau de Cologne (I'd poured in a bottleful for a kind of libation, because I could afford to be extravagant), and planning what a delightful future we would have.

"I should love to chop up Phil's type-writer and burn the

remains," I said to myself; "but she's much more likely to put it away in lavender, or give it to the next-door-girl with the snub nose. Anyhow, I shall never have to write another serial story for *Queen-Woman*, or *The Fireside Lamp*, or any of the other horrors. Oh the joy of not being forced to create villains, only to crush them in the end! No more secret doors and coiners' dens, and unnaturally beautiful dressmakers' assistants for me! Instead of doing typing at ninepence a thousand words Phil can embroider things for curates, and instead of peopling the world with prigs and puppets at a guinea a thou', I can — oh, I can do *anything*. I don't know what I shall want to do most, and that's the best of it — just to know I *can* do it. We'll have a beautiful house in a nice part of town, a cottage by the river, and, best of all, we can travel — travel — travel."

Then I began to furnish the cottage and the house, and was putting up a purple curtain in a white marble bathroom with steps down to the bath, when a knock came at the door.

I knew it was Phil, for it could be nobody else; but it was as unlike Phil as possible — as unlike her as a mountain is unlike itself when it is having an eruption.

"Nell," she called outside the door. "Nell, darling! Are you ready?"

"Only just begun," I answered. "I shall be — oh, minutes and minutes yet. Why?"

"I don't want to worry you," replied Phil's creamy voice, with just a little of the cream skimmed off; "but — do make haste."

"Have you been cooking something nice for breakfast?" (Our usual meal is Quaker oats, with milk; and tea, of course; Phil would think it sacrilegious to begin the day on any other drink.)

"Yes, I have. And it's *wasted*."

"Have you spilt — or burnt it?"

"No; but there's nothing to rejoice over or celebrate, after all; at least, comparatively nothing."

"Good gracious! What *do* you mean?" I shrieked, with my card-house beginning to collapse, while the Eau de Cologne lost its savor in my nostrils. "Has a codicil been found to Captain Noble's will, as in the last number of my serial for —— "

"No; but the post's come, with a letter from his solicitor. Oh, how stupid we were to believe what Mrs. Keithley wrote — just silly gossip. We ought to have remembered that she *couldn't* know; and she never got a story straight, anyway. *Do* hurry and come out."

"I've lost the soap now. Everything invariably goes wrong at once. I *can't* get hold of it. I shall probably be in this bath all the rest of my life. For goodness' sake, what does the lawyer man say?"

"I can't stand here yelling such things at the top of my lungs."

Then I knew how dreadfully poor Phil was really upset, for her lovely voice was quite snappy; and I've always thought she would not snap on the rack or in boiling oil. As for me, my bath began to feel like that — boiling oil, I mean; and I splashed about anyhow, not caring whether I got my hair wet or not. Because, if we had to go on being poor after our great expectations, nothing could possibly matter, not even looking like a drowned rat.

I hadn't the spirit to coax Phyllis, but I might have known she wouldn't go away, really. When I didn't answer except by splashes which might have been sobs, she went on, her mouth apparently at the crack of the door ——

"I suppose we ought to be thankful for such mercies as *have* been granted; but after what we'd been led to expect —— "

"What mercies, as a matter of fact, remain to us?" I asked,

trying to restore depressed spirits as well as circulation with a towel as harsh as fate.

"Two hundred pounds and a motor-boat."

"A *motor-boat?* For goodness' *sake!*"

"Yes. The pounds are for me, the boat for you. It seems you once unfortunately wrote a postcard, and told poor dear Captain Noble you envied him having it. It's said to be as good as new; so there's one comfort, you can sell it second-hand, and perhaps get as much money as he has left me."

I came very near falling down again in the bath with an awful splash, beneath the crushing weight of disappointment, and the soap slipping under my foot.

"Two hundred pounds and a motor-boat — instead of all those thousands!" I groaned — not very loudly; but Phil heard me through the door.

"Never mind, dearest," she called, striving, in that irritating way saints have, to be cheerful in spite of all. "It's better than nothing. We can invest it."

"Invest it!" I screamed. "What are two hundred pounds and a motor-boat when invested?"

Evidently she was doing a sum in mental arithmetic. After a few seconds' silence she answered bravely ——

"About twelve pounds a year."

"*Hang* twelve pounds a year!" I shrieked. Then something odd seemed to happen in my inner workings. My blood gave a jump and flew up to my head, where I could hear it singing — a wild, excited song. Perhaps it was the Eau de Cologne, and not being used to it in my bath, which made me feel like that. "I *shan't* invest my motor-boat," I said. "I'm going a cruise in it, and so are you."

"My darling girl, I hope you haven't gone out of your mind from the blow!" There was alarm and solicitude in Phil's accents. "When you've slipped on your dressing-gown and come out we'll talk things over."

"Nothing can make me change my mind," I answered. "It's been made up a whole minute. Everything is clear now. Providence has put a motor-boat into our hands as a means of seeing life, and to console us for not being Captain Noble's heiresses, as Mrs. Keithley wrote we were going to be. I will *not* fly in Providence's face. I haven't been brought up to it by you. We are going to have the time of our lives with that motor-boat."

The door shook with Phil's disapproval. "You *do* talk like an American," she flung at me through the panel.

"That's good. I'm glad adoption hasn't ruined me," I retorted. "But could *you* — just because you're English — contentedly give up our beautiful plans, and settle down as if nothing had happened — with your type-writer?"

"I hope I have the strength of mind to bear it," faltered Phyllis. "We've only had two days of hoping for better things."

"We've only *lived* for two days. There's no going back; there can't be. We've burned our ships behind us, and must take to the motor-boat."

"Dearest, I don't think this is a proper time for joking — and you in your bath, too," protested Phil, mildly.

"I'm out of it now. But I refuse to be out of everything. Miss Phyllis Rivers — why, your very name's a prophecy! — I formally invite you to take a trip with me in my motor-boat. It may cost us half, if not more, of your part of the legacy; but I will merely borrow from you the wherewithal to pay our expenses. Somehow — afterwards — I'll pay it back, even if I have to reëstablish communication with heavenly shop-girls and villainous duchesses. Oh, Phil, we'll get some fun out of this, after all. Anyhow, we shall go on *living* — for a few weeks. What matter if, after that, the deluge?"

"You speak exactly as if you were planning to be an *adventuress*," said Phyllis, coldly.

"I should love to be one," said I. "I've always thought it must be more fun than anything — till the last chapter. We'll both embark — in the motor-boat — on a brief but bright career as adventuresses."

With that, before she could give me an answer, I opened the door and walked out in my dressing-gown, so suddenly that she almost pitched forward into the bath. Phyllis, heard from behind a cold, unsympathetic door, and Phyllis seen in all her virginal Burne-Jones attractiveness, might as well be two different girls. If you carried on a conversation with Miss Rivers on ethics and conventionalities and curates, and things of that kind from behind a door, without having first peeped round to see what she was like, you would do the real Phil an injustice.

There is nothing pink and soft and dimpled about Phyllis's views of life (or, at least, what she supposes her views to be); but about Phyllis in flesh and blood there is more of that than anything else; which is one reason why she has been a constant fountain of joy to my heart as well as my sense of humor, ever since her clever Herefordshire father married my pretty Kentucky mother.

Phil would like, if published, to be a Sunday-school book, and a volume of "Good Form for High Society" rolled into one; but she is really more like a treatise on flower-gardens, and a recipe for making Devonshire junket with clotted cream.

Not that she's a regular beauty, or that she goes in for any speciality by way of features or eyelashes, or hair, or a figure, or anything really sensational of that sort, as I do in one or two directions. But there's a rose and pearl and gold-brown adorableness about her; you like her all the better for some little puritanical quaintnesses; and if you are an Englishman or an American girl, you long to bully her.

She is taller than I am (as she ought to be, with Burne-

Jones nose and eyes), but this morning, when I sprang at her out of the bath-room, like a young tigress escaped from its cage on its ruthless way to a motor-boat, she looked so piteous and yielding, that I felt I could carry her — and my point at the same time — half across the world.

She had made cream eggs for breakfast, poor darling (I could have sobbed on them), and actually coffee for me, because she knows I love it. I didn't worry her any more until an egg and a cup of tea were on duty to keep her strength up, and then I poured plans, which I made as I went on, upon her meekly protesting head.

The boat, it appeared, lay in Holland, which fact, as I pointed out to Phil, was another sign that Providence had set its heart upon our using her; for we've always wanted to see Holland. We often said, if we ever took a holiday from serials and the type-writer, we would go to Holland; but somehow the time for holidays and Holland never seemed to arrive. Now, here it was; and it would be *the* time of our lives.

Poor Captain Noble meant to use the boat himself this summer, but he was taken ill late in the season on the Riviera and died there. It was from Mentone that Mrs. Keithley wrote what was being said among his friends about a huge legacy for us; and we, poor deluded ones, had believed.

Captain Noble, a dear old retired naval officer, was a friend of Phyllis's father since the beginning of the world, and, though Phil was sixteen and I fifteen when our respective parents (widowed both, ages before) met and married, the good man took my mother also to his heart. Phil and I have been alone in the world together now for three years; she is twenty-two, I twenty-one. Though many moons have passed since we saw anything of Captain Noble except picture postcards, we were not taken entirely by surprise when we heard that he had left us a large legacy. It is easy to get used to nice things, and far more difficult to crawl down gracefully from gilded heights.

Crawl we must, however; so I determined it should be into that motor-boat floating idly on a canal in Holland.

The letter from the solicitor (a French solicitor, or the equivalent, writing from the Riviera) told us all about the boat and about the money. The boat must be got by going or sending to Rotterdam, the money obtained in London.

A thirty horse-power (why not thirty dolphin-power?) motor-boat sounds very grand to read about; and as I recovered from my first disappointment I began to feel as if I'd suddenly become proprietor of a whole circus full of champing steeds. I tried to persuade Phyllis that I should write better stories if I could travel a little in my own motor-boat, as it would broaden my mind; therefore it would pay in the end. Besides, I wasn't sure my health was not breaking down from overstrain; not only that, I felt it would be *right* to go; and, anyhow, I just would go — so there.

I argued till I was on the point of fainting or having a fit, and I've no doubt that it was my drawn face (what face wouldn't have been drawn?) to which Phil's soft heart and obstinate mind finally succumbed.

She said that, as I seemed determined to go through fire and water (I never heard of any hot springs in the canals of Holland), she supposed she would have to stick by me, for she was older than I and couldn't allow me to go alone under any consideration, especially with my coloring and hair. But, though experience of me had accustomed her to shocks and, she must confess, to sacrifices, she had never expected until now that she would be called upon for my sake to become an adventuress.

As for the two hundred pounds, that part didn't signify. I needn't suppose she was thinking of it; thank Heaven, whether we worked or were idle we would still have our settled hundred and twenty pounds a year each. It was our reputation for which she cared most, and she was sure the *least* evil that could befall us would be to blow up.

"Better do it on a grand scale in a thirty horse-power motor-boat than in a gas-meter bath-tub of a five-room flat in Clapham," I remarked; and somehow that silenced Phyllis, except for a sigh.

Since then I've been in a whirl of excitement preparing my watery path as a motor-boat adventuress, and buying a dress or two to suit the part. It doesn't even depress me that Phil has selected hers with the air of acquiring a serviceable shroud.

I've finished up three serials in as many days, killing off my villains like flies, and creating a perfect epidemic of hastily made matches among titled heroes and virtuous nursery governesses. Scarcely an aristocratic house in England that wouldn't shake to its foundations if fiction were fact; but then my fiction isn't of the kind that anything short of a dislocated universe could possibly make fact.

Phyllis, with the face of a tragic Muse, has been writing letters to her clients recommending another typist — quite a professional sort of person, who was her understudy once, a year or so ago, when she thoughtlessly allowed herself to come down with measles.

"Miss Brown never puts 'q' instead of 'a,' or gets chapter titles on one side; and she knows how to make the *loveliest* curlicues under her headings. Nobody will ever want me to come back," the poor girl wailed.

"All the better for them, if you're going to blow up, as you are convinced you will," I strove to console her, as I tried on a yachting-cap, reduced to two three-farthings from four shillings. But she merely shuddered. And now, when at last we have shut up the flat, turned the key upon our pasts, and got irrevocably on board the "Batavier" boat, which will land us in Rotterdam, she has moaned more than once, "I feel as if nothing would be the same with us ever, ever again."

"So do I," I've answered unfeelingly. "And I'm *glad*."

II

THIS is the first time I have been on a sea-going ship since I crossed from America with my mother, neither of us dreaming that she would settle down and give me an Englishman for a stepfather. As for Phil, she has no memories outside her native land — except early ones of Paris — and, though she has a natural instinct for the preservation of her young life, I don't doubt that every motion of the big boat in the night made her realize how infinitely more decorous it would be to drown on the "Batavier 4" than in a newfangled motor thing on an obscure foreign canal.

The Thames we have seen before, in all its bigness and richness and black ugliness; for on hot summer days we have embarked on certain trips which would condemn us forever in the eyes of duchesses, countesses, and other ladies of title I have known serially, in instalments. But we (or rather, I) chose to reach Holland by water, as it seems a more appropriate preface to our adventure; and I got Phyllis up before five in the morning, not to miss by any chance the first sight of the Low Lands.

We were only just in time, for we hadn't had our coffee and been dressed many minutes before my eyes caught at a line of land as a drowning person is supposed to catch at a straw.

"Holland!" said I; which was not particularly intelligent in me, as it couldn't have been anything else.

There it lay, this stage set for our drama, comedy, tragedy — whatever it may prove — of which we don't yet know the

plot, although we are the heroines; and now that I'm writing in a Rotterdam hotel the curtain may be said to have rung up on the first act.

Just then it was lifted only far enough to show a long, low waste of gray-green, with a tuft or two of trees and a few shadowy individuals, which the stage-hands had evidently set in motion for the benefit of the leading ladies.

"We might be the Two Orphans," I said, "only you're not blind, Phil — except in your sense of humor; and I'm afraid there are no wicked Dutch noblemen to kidnap me——"

"Oh dear, I'm sure I hope not!" exclaimed Phil, looking as if a new feather had been heaped on her load of anxieties.

The line was no longer gray now, nor was it a waste. It was a bright green, floating ribbon, brocaded with red flowers; and soon it was no ribbon, but a stretch of grassy meadow, and the red flowers were roofs; yet meadows and roofs were not just common meadows and roofs, for they belonged to Holland; and everybody knows — even those who haven't seen it yet — that Holland is like no country in the world, except its queer, cozy, courageous, obstinate little self.

The sky was blue to welcome us, and housewifely Dutch angels were beating up the fat, white cloud-pillows before tucking them under the horizon out of sight. Even the air seemed to have been washed till it glittered with crystalline clearness that brought each feature of the landscape strangely close to the eyes.

We were in the River Maas, which opened its laughing mouth wide to let in our boat. But soon it was so busy with its daily toil that it forgot to smile and look its best for strangers. We saw it in its brown working-dress, giving water to ugly manufactories, and floating an army of big ships, black lighters, and broadly built craft, which coughed spasmodically as they forged sturdily and swiftly through the waters. Their breath was like the whiff that comes from an automobile, and

I knew that they must be motor-barges. My heart warmed to them. They seemed to have been sent out on purpose to say, "Your fun is going to begin."

At last we were in Rotterdam, steaming slowly between two lines of dignified quays, ornamented with rows of trees and backed by quaintly built, many-colored brick houses — blue and green and pink, some nodding forward, some leaning back. The front walls were carried up to conceal the roofs; many of the façades tapered into triangles; others had double curves like a swan's neck; some were cut into steps — so that there was great variety, and an effect almost Chinese about the architecture of the queer houses with the cranes projecting over their topmost windows. There was nothing to be called beautiful, but it was all impressive and interesting, because so different from that part of the world which we know.

A gigantic railway bridge of latticed iron flung itself across the skyline; one huge white building, like a New York sky-scraper, towered head and shoulders above the close-leaning roofs of the city; and all among the houses were brown sails and masts of ships; water-streets and land-streets tangled inseparably together.

The hum of life — strange, foreign life! — filled the air; an indescribable, exciting sound, made up of the wind whistling among cordage of sea-going ships, the shouts of men at work, the river slapping against piles and the iron sides of vessels, the whirr and clank of steam-cranes. Wreaths of brown smoke blew gustily in the sunlight; a train boomed across the latticed bridge; and the hoot of a siren tore all other sounds in shreds. Creakily our ship was warped in by straining cables, and I said to myself, "The overture's finished. The play is going to begin."

Phil and I streamed off the boat with the other passengers, who had the air of knowing exactly why they'd come, where they were going, and what was the proper thing to do next.

But as soon as we were landed on the most extraordinary place, which looked as if trees and houses had sprouted on a dyke, all consecutive ideas were ground out of our heads in the mill of confusing sights and sounds. Friends were meeting each other, and jabbering something which sounded at a distance like Glasgow-English, and like no known language when you were close enough to catch the words. Porters surged round us, urging the claims of rival hotels; men in indigo cotton blouses pleaded for our luggage; and altogether we were overwhelmed by a tidal wave of Dutchness.

How order finally came out of chaos I hardly know; but when I got my breath it occurred to me that we might temporarily abandon our big luggage and steer through the crowd, with dressing-bags in our hands, to hail an elderly cab whose driver had early selected us as prey.

Before getting into the vehicle I paused, and tried to concentrate my mind on plans; though the quaint picture of the Boompjes, and the thought that *we*, Phyllis Rivers and Nell Van Buren, should be on the Boompjes was distracting. I did manage, however, to find our boat's address and the name of the caretaker, both of which I had on a piece of paper with loose "i's" and "j's" scattered thickly through every word. All we had to do, therefore, was to tell our moth-eaten cabman to drive to the place, show the letters from the solicitor (and perhaps a copy of Captain Noble's will), claim our property from the hands of Jan Paasma, and then, if we liked, take up our quarters on our own boat until we could engage some one to "work it" for our tour. Luckily, we'd had coffee and rolls on board the "Batavier"; so we needn't bother about breakfast, as I said joyously to Phil.

But Phil, it seemed, did not regard breakfast as a bother. She thought it would be fatal to throw ourselves into a formidable undertaking unless we first had tea and an egg, and somebody to advise us.

"We must go to an hotel before we see the boat," said she, firmly.

"But who's to give us advice at a hotel?" I asked with scorn.

"Oh, I don't know. The manager."

"Managers of hotels aren't engaged to advise young women about motor-boats."

"Well, then, a — a waiter."

"A *waiter!*"

"We could ask the head one. And, anyway, he would be a *man.*"

"My darling child, have we ever depended on a man since your father died?"

"We've never had emergencies, except taking our flat — oh, and buying my type-writer. Besides, I can't bear all I shall have to bear without a cup of tea."

This settled it. We climbed into that frail shell, our chosen cab, and I opened the Dutch phrase-book which I bought in London. I wanted to find out what hotel was nearest to the lair of our boat, but in that wild moment I could discover nothing more appropriate than "I wish immediately some medicine for seasickness," and (hastily turning over the pages) "I have lost my pet cat." I began mechanically to stammer French and the few words of German which for years have lain peacefully buried in the dustiest folds of my intellect.

"Oh, dear, how *shall* I make him understand what we want?" I groaned, my nerves quivering under the pitying eye of the cabman, and the early-Christian-martyr expression of Phyllis.

"Don't ask *me,*" said she, in icy vengefulness; "you *would* bring me to Holland, and I shouldn't speak Dutch if I could."

"I spik Eengleesh," announced the cabman.

I could have fallen upon his bosom, which, though littered with dust and grease-spots, I was sure concealed a noble

heart. But I contented myself with taking him into my confidence. I said we had a motor-boat, and wanted to go to a hotel as near it as possible. I then showed the precious paper with the "i's" and "j's" dotted about, and he nodded so much that his tall hat, which looked like a bit cut out of a rusty stove-pipe, almost fell off on my nose.

"You get on my carriage, and I drive you to where you want," he replied reassuringly, making of our luggage a resting-place for his honest boots, and climbing into his seat.

Magnetized by his manner, we obeyed, and it was not until we had started, rattling over the stone-paved street, that Phil bethought herself of an important detail.

"Wait a moment. Ask him if it's a nice hotel where he's taking us."

I stood up, seized the railing of the driver's seat to steady myself, and shrieked the question above the noise of the wheels.

"I take you right place," he returned; and I repeated the sentence to Phyllis.

"That's no answer. Ask him if it's respectable; we can't go if it isn't. Ask him if it's expensive; we can't go if it is."

I yelled the message.

"I take you hotel by-and-by. You see Rotterdam a little first."

"But we don't want to see Rotterdam first. We want breakfast. Rotterdam by-and-by."

A sudden bump flung me down onto the hard seat. I half rose to do battle again; then, as I gazed up at that implacable Dutch back, I began dimly to understand how Holland, though a dot of a nation, tired out and defeated fiery Spain. I knew that no good would be accomplished by resisting that back. Short of hurling ourselves out on the stones, we would have to see Rotterdam, so we might as well make the best of it. And this I urged upon Phil, with reproaches for her

niggardliness in not buying Baedeker, who would have put stars to tell us the names of hotels, and given us crisp maps to show where they were situated in connection with other things.

I should think few people who have lived in Rotterdam for years have really seen as much of the town as we saw on this clear blue morning.

At first the information bestowed upon us by the owner of the back seemed an adding of insult to injury. How dared he explain what he was forcing us to see in spite of ourselves? But, by-and-by, even Phyllis fell to laughing, and her dimples are to her temper what rainbows are to thunder-showers — once they are out there can be no more storm.

"I feel as if we'd seen samples of all Holland, and were ready to go to our peaceful home again," said Phil, after we'd driven about from the region of big shops and imposing arcades, to shady streets mirroring brown mansions in glassy canals; on to toy villages of miniature painted houses, standing in flowery gardens, far below the level of adjacent ponds adorned with flower-islands; through large parks and intricate plantations; past solemnly flapping windmills; far beyond, to meadows where black and white cows recognized the fact that we were not Dutch and despised us for it; then back to parks and gardens again. "I shouldn't think there could be any sort of characteristic thing left which we haven't met with. I'm sure I could go home now and talk intelligently about Holland."

We couldn't help being interested in everything, though we were seeing it against our wills; yet it was a relief to our feelings when the Back unbent to the extent of stopping before an old-fashioned, low-built hotel, close to a park. So far as we could judge, it was miles from anywhere, and had no connection with anything else; but we were too thankful for the privilege of stopping, to be critical. The house had an air

of quiet rectitude which appealed to Phil, and without a word she allowed our luggage to be taken off the cab.

When we came to pay, it appeared that our driver hadn't made us acquainted with every secret of Rotterdam, purely in a spirit of generosity. We were called upon to part with almost all the gulden we had got in exchange for shillings on board the boat, and Phil looked volumes as it dawned on her intelligence that each one of these coins (with the head of an incredibly mild and whiskered old gentleman upon it) was worth one and eightpence.

"At this rate we shall soon be in the poorhouse," she said.

"If it comes to that, we can stop the motor-boat at villages and solicit alms," I suggested.

After all, the Back had had some method in its madness, for on showing the caretaker's address to a giant hall-porter, it appeared that the place was within ten minutes' walk of the hotel. We refused to decide upon rooms until our future plans had shaped themselves; and our luggage reposed in the hall while we had cups of tea and a Dutch conception of toast in a garden, whose charms we shared with a rakish wandering Jew of a tortoise.

Many times since I induced Phyllis to join me in becoming an adventuress, have we vaguely arranged what we would do on arriving at Rotterdam. The program seemed simple enough from a distance — just to go and pick up our boat (so to speak) and motor away with it; but when we actually started off, pioneered by a small boy from the hotel, to take possession of our property, I had a horrid sinking of the heart, which I wouldn't for many heads of whiskered old gentlemen on gulden have confessed to Phil. I felt that "something was going to happen."

The "ten minutes'" walk prolonged itself into twenty, and then there was a ferry over a wide, brown, swift-flowing stream. This brought us to a little basin opening from the

river, where one or two small yachts and other craft nestled together.

"Look!" I exclaimed, with a sudden throb of excitement, which bubbled up like a geyser through the cold crust of my depression. "*There* she is!"

"Who?" cried Phyllis, starting. "Any one we know?"

"Our boat, silly. 'Lorelei.' I suppose you think she ought to be called 'White Elephant'?"

Yes, there she was, with "Lorelei" in gold letters on her bows, this fair siren who had lured us across the North Sea; and instead of being covered up and shabby to look at after her long winter of retirement and neglect, she had the air of being ready to start off at a moment's notice to begin a cruise.

Every detail of her smart white dress looked new. There was no fear of delay for painting and patching. Clean cocoanut matting was spread upon the floor of the little decks fore and aft; the brass rails dazzled our eyes with their brilliance; the windows of the roofed cabin were brighter than the Koh-i-nur, the day I went to see it in the Tower of London; basket-chairs, with pink and blue and primrose silk cushions, stood on deck, their arms open in a welcoming gesture. There was a little table, too, which looked born and bred for a tea-table. It really was extraordinary.

"Oh, Nell, it is a *pretty* boat!" The words were torn from Phil in reluctant admiration. "Of course it's most awfully reckless of us to have come, and I don't see what's going to happen in the end; but — but it *does* seem as if we might enjoy ourselves. Fancy having tea on our own deck! Why, it's almost a yacht! I wonder what Lady Hutchinson would say if she could see us sitting in those chairs! She'd be polite to me for a whole month."

Lady Hutchinson is Phil's one titled client. Long ago her husband was a grocer. She writes sentimental poetry, and her idea of dignity is to snub her type-writer. But I couldn't con-

We were called upon to part with almost all the gulden

centrate my mind on the pleasure of astonishing Lady Hutchinson. I was thinking what a wonderful caretaker Jan Paasma must be.

"Conscientious" hardly expressed him, because it's almost a year since Captain Noble used "Lorelei," and we hadn't written that we were coming to claim her; yet here she was, *en fête* for our reception. But then, I thought, perhaps our dear old friend had left instructions to keep the boat always ready. It would be rather like him: and, in any case, we should soon know all, as Mr. Paasma's dwelling is a little green house close to the miniature quay. We saw his name over the door, for evidently he doesn't entirely depend upon his guardianship of boats for a livelihood. He owns a shop, with indescribable things in the one cramped but shining window — things which only those who go down to the sea in ships could possibly wish to have.

For all we could tell he might be on board the boat, which floated a yard or two from shore, moored by ropes; but it seemed more professional to seek Mr. Paasma under his own roof, and we did so, nearly falling over a stout child who was scrubbing the floor of the shop.

"What a queer time of day to be cleaning — eleven o'clock," muttered Phil, having just saved herself from a tumble. I thought so too; but then we'd been in Holland only a few hours. We hadn't yet realized the relative importance of certain affairs of life, according to a Dutchwoman's point of view.

We glared reproachfully at the stout child, as much as to say, "Why *don't* you finish your swabbing at a proper hour?" She glared at us as if she would have demanded, "What the (Dutch) Dickens do you mean by bouncing in and upsetting my arrangements?"

Little was accomplished on either side by this skirmishing; so I put my pride in my pocket and inquired for her master.

"Boot," replied the creature. "Boot," pointing with her mop in the direction whence we had come.

We understood by this that the caretaker was at his post, and we returned to shout the name of Heer Paasma.

Nothing happened at first; but after several spasmodic repetitions a blue silk curtain flickered at one of the cabin windows on "Lorelei," and a little, old, brown face, with a fringe of fluff round the chin, appeared in the aperture — a walnut of a face, with a pair of shrewd, twinkling eyes, and a pipe in a slit of a mouth. Another call brought on deck a figure which matched the face; and on deck Mr. Paasma (it looked like a gnome, but it could be no other than the caretaker) evidently intended to remain until he got a satisfactory explanation.

III

"ARE you Heer Paasma?" I inquired from my distance.

The walnut nodded.

"Do you speak English?"

Out came the pipe. "Ja, a leetle."

"We're Miss Rivers and Miss Van Buren, from England. I'm Miss Van Buren. You have heard about me, and that Captain Noble left me his motor-boat in his will."

"No, I not heerd." A dark flush slowly turned the sharp little walnut face to mahogany.

"How strange! I thought the solicitor would have written. But perhaps it wasn't necessary. Anyway, I have all the papers to prove that the boat is mine. You did know poor Captain Noble was dead, surely?"

"Ja, I hear that."

"Well, if you'll put a plank across, we'll come on board, and I'll show you my papers and explain everything."

"I come on shore," said Mr. Paasma.

"No, we would rather ——"

I might have saved my breath. Mr. Paasma was Dutch, and he had made up his mind what would be best. The rest goes without saying. He seized one of the ropes, hauled the boat closer to shore, and sprang onto the bank.

There was a strange glitter in his eye. I supposed it to be the bleak glint of suspicion, and hastened to reassure the excellent man by producing my papers, pointing out paragraphs which I placed conspicuously under his nose, in our copy of Captain Noble's will, and the letters I had received from the solicitor.

"You see," I said at last, "everything is all right. You need have no hesitation in giving the boat to me."

Mr. Paasma puffed at his pipe, which he held very tight between his teeth, and stared at the papers without looking up.

"If you like, you can apply to your lawyer, if you have one," I went on, seeing that he was far from easy in his mind. "I'm quite willing to meet him. Besides"— I had suddenly a brilliant idea —"I have relations in Rotterdam. Their name is the same as mine — van Buren. Perhaps you have heard of Heer Robert van Buren?"

"Ja," replied Mr. Paasma, biting his pipe still harder. Instead of looking happy, his face grew so troubled that I wondered whether my mention of these unknown relatives had been unfortunate — whether, by any chance, a member of the family had lately committed some crime. Meanwhile, Phyllis stared. For my own reasons I had refrained from speaking to her of these relations; now, urged by necessity, I brought them to light; but what they might be, or whether they still existed in Rotterdam I knew no more than did Phil.

"Mynheer van Buren is a known man," said the caretaker. "You not send for him. I think the boat is to you, missus. What you want do?"

"First of all, we want to go on board and look at her," I replied.

This time, rather to my surprise, he made no objections. A dark pall of resignation had fallen upon him. In such a mood as his, an Indian woman would go to Suttee without a qualm. He pulled the boat to shore, placed a plank, and with a thrilling pride of possession we walked on board.

There were some steep steps which led down from the deck to the cabin, and Phyllis and I descended, Mr. Paasma stolidly following, with an extraordinary expression on his walnut face. It was not exactly despairing, or defiant, or

"You need have no hesitation in giving the boat to me"

angry, or puzzled; but it held something of each one of these emotions.

However, I soon forgot about the caretaker and his feelings in admiration of "Lorelei." Aft, you looked down into the motor-room, with a big monster of machinery, which I respected but didn't understand. From that, when you'd crossed a little passage, you had to go down some more steps into a cabin which was so charming that I stood still on the threshold, and said, "Oh!"

"Why, it's prettier than our drawing-room!" exclaimed Phil; "and my favorite colors too, green and white. It's almost like a boudoir. Who could have supposed Captain Noble would have so much taste? And do look at that darling old Dutch clock over the — the buffet or whatever it is, with all the little ships rocking on the waves every time it ticks."

We were both so much excited now that we began to talk together, neither of us listening to the other. We opened the door of what Phil called the "buffet," and found neat little piles of blue-and-white china. There were tiny tablecloths and napkins too, and knives and forks and spoons. On one of the seats (which could be turned into berths at night) stood a smart tea-basket. We peeped inside, and it was the nicest tea-basket imaginable, which must have come from some grand shop in Bond Street, with its gold and white cups, and its gleaming nickel and silver. In the locker were sheets and blankets; on a bracket by the clock was a book-shelf with glass doors, and attractive-looking novels inside.

"How pathetic it is!" I cried. "Poor Captain Noble! He must have enjoyed getting together these nice things; and now they are all for *us*."

"And here — *oh*, this is *too* sad! His poor, dear shirts and things," sighed Phil, making further discoveries in another, smaller cabin beyond. "Drawers full of them. Fancy his leaving them here all winter — and they don't seem a bit damp."

I followed her into a green-and-pink cabin, a tiny den, but pretty enough for an artist instead of an old retired sea-captain.

"What shall we do with them?" she asked. "We might keep them all to remember him by, perhaps; only — they would be such odd sorts of souvenirs for girls to have, and — oh, my goodness, Nell, who could have dreamed of Captain Noble in — in whatever it is?"

Whatever it was, it was pale-blue silk, with lovely pink stripes of several shades, and there was a jacket which Phil was just holding out by its shoulders, to admire, when a slight cough made us turn our heads.

It is strange what individuality there can be in a cough. We would have sworn if we'd heard it while locked up with Mr. Paasma in a dark cell, where there was no other human being to produce it, that he couldn't have uttered such an interesting cough.

Before we turned, we knew that there was a stranger on "Lorelei," but we were surprised when we saw what sort of stranger he was.

He stood in the narrow doorway between the two cabins, looking at us with bright, dark eyes, like Robert Louis Stevenson's, and dressed in smart flannels and a tall collar, such as Robert Louis Stevenson would never have consented to wear.

"I beg your pardon," said he, in a nice, drawling voice, which told me that he'd first seen the light in one of the Southern States of America.

"I beg yours," said I. (Somehow Phil generally waits for me to speak first in emergencies, though she's a year older.) "Are you looking for any one — the caretaker of our boat, perhaps?"

His eyes traveled from me to Phil; from Phil to the blue garment to which she still clung; from the blue garment to the pile of stiff white shirts in an open drawer.

"No — o, I wasn't exactly looking for any one," he slowly replied. "I just came on board to — er ——"

"To *what*, if you please?" I demanded, beginning to stiffen. "I've a right to know, because this is our boat. If you're a newspaper reporter, or anything of that sort, please go away; but if you have business ——"

"No, it was only pleasure," said the young man, his eyes like black diamonds. "I didn't know the boat was yours."

"Whose did you think it was?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I — er — thought it was mine."

"What do you mean?" I cried, while Phil threw a wild, questioning look at the shirts, and dropped the blue silk jacket.

"That is, temporarily. But there must be some mistake."

"There must — a big mistake. Where's the caretaker? He came on board with us."

The young man's eyes twinkled even more. "Did he know it was your boat?"

"Why, of course, we told him. It was left to us in a will. We've just come to claim it."

"Oh, I think I begin to see. I shouldn't wonder if Paasma has now taken to his bed with a sudden attack of — whatever the Dutch have instead of nervous prostration. He didn't know you were coming?"

"Not till we came."

"It must have been quite a surprise. By Jove, the old fox! I suppose he hadn't got the shadow of a right, then, to let the boat to me?"

"My gracious!" breathed Phyllis, and shut up the drawer of shirts with a snap. I don't know what she did with the blue silk object, except that it suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from the floor. Perhaps she stood on it.

"What an awful thing," said I. "You're sure you're not in the wrong boat? You're sure he didn't let you some other one?"

"Sure. There is no other one in Holland exactly like this. I've been on board nearly every day for a week, ever since I began to ——"

"Since you began ——"

"To have her done up. Nothing to speak of, you know; but she's been lying here all winter, and — er — I had a fancy to clean house ——"

"Then — all these things are — yours?"

"Some of the things ——"

"The Dutch clock, the deck-chairs, the silk cushions, the curtains, and decorations in the cabin ——"

"I'm afraid you think I'm an awful meddler; but, you see, I didn't know. Paasma told me he had a right to let the boat, and that I could do her up as much as I liked."

"The old wretch!" I gasped. "And you walk on board to find two strange girls rummaging among your — your ——" Then I couldn't help laughing when I remembered how Phil had suggested our keeping those things for souvenirs.

"I thought I must be having a dream — a beautiful dream."

I ignored the implied compliment. "What are we going to do about it?" I asked. "It *is* our boat. There's no doubt about that. But with these things of yours — do you want to go to law, or — or — anything?"

"Good heavens, no! I ——"

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said I. "Let's get the caretaker here, and have it out with him. Perhaps he has an explanation."

"He's certain to have — several. Shall I go and fetch him?"

"Please do," urged Phil, speaking for the first time, and looking adorably pink.

The young man vanished, and we heard him running up the steep companion (if that's the right word for it) two steps at a time.

Phil and I stared at each other. "I knew something awful would happen," said she. "This is a judgment."

"He's too nice looking to be a judgment," said I. "I like his taste in everything — including shirts, don't you?"

"Don't speak of them," commanded Phil.

We shut the drawers tightly, and going into the other cabin, did the same there.

"Anyhow, I saw 'C. Noble' on the sheets and blankets," I said thankfully. "There are some things that belong to us."

"It will end in our going home at once, I suppose," said Phil.

"However else it ends, it won't end like that, I promise you," I assured her. "I must have justice."

"But he must have his things. Oh, Nell, have you really got relatives in Rotterdam, or did you make that up to frighten the caretaker?"

"No; they exist. I never spoke of them to you, because I never thought of them until we were coming here, and then I was afraid if I did you'd think it the proper thing to implore the females — if any — to chaperon us. Besides, relations so often turn out bores. All I know about mine is, that mother told me father had relations in Holland — in Rotterdam. And if she and I hadn't stopped in England to take care of you and your father, perhaps we should have come here and met them long ago."

"Well, do let's look them up and get them to help. I won't say a word about chaperons."

"Perhaps it would be a good thing. That wicked old caretaker seemed to be struck with respectful awe by the name of Van Buren."

"I never knew before that you were partly Dutch."

"You did. I've often boasted of my Knickerbocker blood."

"Yes. But ——"

"Didn't you know it was the same thing? Where's your knowledge of history?"

"I never had much time to study *American* history. There was such a lot that came before," said Phil, mildly; but the blood sprang to her cheeks at the sound of a step on the stairs. Our rival for possession of the boat had come back alone.

"That old rascal has, with extraordinary suddenness and opportuneness, forgotten every word of English," he announced, "and pretends not to understand German. I can't speak Dutch; can you?"

"No," said I. "Not a syllable. But he spoke English quite respectably an hour ago."

"That was before he was found out. He can now do nothing but shake his head and say '*niets verstaen*,' or something that sounds like that. I thought of killing him, but concluded it would be better to wait until I'd asked you how you'd like it done."

"It ought to be something lingering," said I. "We'll talk it over. But first, perhaps, we'd better decide what's to be done with *ourselves*. You see, we've come to Holland to have a cruise on our new boat; otherwise, if you liked, *we*, as the real owners, might let her to you, and all would be well. Still, it does seem a shame that you should be disappointed when you took 'Lorelei' in good faith, and made her so pretty. Of course, you must let us know what you've paid ——"

"A few gulden," said the young man, evasively.

"Never mind. You must tell how many. Unfortunately that won't mend your disappointment. But — what can we do?"

"I suppose there isn't the slightest hope that you could — er — take me as a passenger?"

"Oh, we couldn't possibly do that," hastily exclaimed Phil. "We're alone. Though my stepsister, Miss Van Buren, has cousins in Rotterdam, we've come from England without a chaperon, and — for the present ——"

The young man's eyes were more brilliant than ever, though the rest of his face looked sad.

"Oh, don't say any more," he implored. "I see how it is. I oughtn't to have made such a suggestion. My only excuse is, I was thinking — of my poor aunt. She'll be horribly disappointed. I care most for her, and what she'll feel at giving up the cruise."

"Oh, was your aunt coming?" I asked.

"Yes, my Scotch aunt. Such a charming woman. I'm an American, you know. Clever of me to have a Scotch aunt, but I have. I've been visiting her lately, near Edinburgh. You would like Lady MacNairne, I think."

Phil's face changed. She is the last girl in the world to be a snob; but hearing that this young man had a Scotch aunt, with a title, was almost as good as a proper introduction. And there really is something singularly winning about my countryman. I suppose it is that he has "a way with him," as the Irish say. Besides, it seemed nice of so young a man to care so much about a mere aunt. Many young men depise aunts as companions; but evidently he isn't one of those, as he beautified "Lorelei" simply to give his aunt pleasure.

"It really *does* seem hard," I said. "Now, if only Phyllis hadn't so many rules of propriety —" But, to my surprise, the very thought in my mind, which I hadn't dared breathe, was spoken out next minute by Phil herself.

"Maybe we might come to some kind of arrangement — as you have an aunt," she faltered.

"Yes, as you have an aunt," I repeated.

"She'd make an ideal chaperon for young ladies," hastily went on the Southerner. "I should like you to meet her."

"Is Lady MacNairne in Rotterdam?" asked Phil.

"Not exactly; but she's coming — almost at once."

"We don't know your name yet," said Phyllis. "I'm Miss

Rivers; my stepsister is Miss Van Buren. Perhaps you'd better introduce yourself."

"I shall be glad to," returned my countryman. "My name is Ronald Lester Starr —— "

"Why, the initials are just right — R. L. S." I murmured.

"I know what you mean," he said, with a nice smile. "They say I look like him. I'm very proud. You'll think I ought to be a writer; but I'm not. I paint a little — just enough to call myself an artist —— "

"Oh, I remember," I broke in. "I thought the name sounded familiar. You had a picture in the Salon this spring."

He looked anxious. "Did you see it?"

"No — not even a copy. What was the subject? Horrid of me to ask; but, you see, it's July now, and one forgets."

"One does," he admitted, as if he were pleased. "Oh, it was only a portrait of my aunt."

"Your Scotch aunt?"

"Yes. But if you'd seen it, and then should see her, you mightn't even recognize her. I — er — didn't try to make a striking likeness."

"I wish I'd seen the picture," said I. And I thought Mr. Starr must be very modest, for his expression suggested that he didn't echo my wish.

"Do you think you could let my aunt and me join you?" he asked. "I don't mean to crowd up your boat; that would never do, for you might want to sleep on it sometimes. But I might get a barge, and you could tow it. I'd thought of that very thing; indeed, I've practically engaged a barge. My friend and I, who were to have chummed together, if he hadn't been called away — oh, you know, that was a plan before my aunt promised to come, quite another idea. But what I mean to say is, I got an idea for hiring a barge, and having is towed by the motor-boat. I could have had a studio in that way, for I wanted to do some painting. I'd just come back from

seeing rather a jolly barge that's to let, when I — er — stumbled on you."

"Had you engaged any one to work 'Lorelei'?"

"A chauffeur," said Mr. Ronald; "but no skipper for certain yet. I've been negotiating."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed. "Must we have a chauffeur and a skipper too?"

"I'm afraid we must; a man who understands the waterways of Holland. A chauffeur understands only the motor, and lucky if he does that."

"Won't it be dreadfully expensive?" asked Phyllis.

"The skipper's wages won't be more than five or six dollars (a bit more than one of your sovereigns) a week, and the chauffeur less. They'll keep themselves, but I meant them to sleep on the barge. The skipper ought to be a smart chap, who can be trusted with money to pay the expenses of the boat as one goes along — bridge-money and all sorts of things. The chauffeur can buy the *essence* — petrol, you call it in England, don't you? — but the skipper had better do the rest."

"It does seem a frightful responsibility for two girls," said Phyllis.

"Of course, if you'd consent to have my aunt — and me — we'd take all the trouble off your hands, and half the expense," remarked Mr. Starr. "My poor aunt is so fond of the water, and there's so little in Scotland ——"

"Little in Scotland?"

"Well, only a few lakes and rivers. It does seem hard she should be disappointed."

"She mightn't like us," said Phyllis.

"She would lo — I mean, she'd be no aunt of mine if she didn't. I'd cut her off with a penny."

"It's generally aunts who do that with their nephews," said I.

IV

"HOW funny if I've got relations who can't speak any language except Dutch!" I said, after I'd sent a letter by messenger to the address of the Robert van Buren found in the directory.

But half an hour later an answer came back, in English. Mine very sincerely, Robert van Buren, would give himself the pleasure of calling on his cousin immediately. When I received this news it was one o'clock, and we were finishing lunch at the hotel, in the society of Mr. Starr, who had already wired to his aunt that she was to play the part of chaperon.

I read the letter aloud, and Phil and I decided that it sounded *old*.

"Mother spoke once or twice of father's cousin, Robert van Buren; so I suppose he's about the age my father would have been if he'd lived," I said. "I hope he'll not turn out a horror."

"I hope he'll not forbid you to associate with my aunt and me," cut in Mr. Starr. "It's a stiff kind of handwriting."

"He can't make me stiff," said I. "Cousins twice removed don't count — except when they can be useful."

"A gentleman in the reading-room to see you, miss," announced the waiter, who could speak English, handing me a card on a tray. It was a foreign-looking card, and I couldn't feel in the least related to it, especially as the "van" began with a little "v."

"Come and support me, Phil," I begged, glancing regretfully at a seductive bit of Dutch cheese studded with caraway seeds, which it would be rude to stop and eat.

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"It's generally aunts who do that with their nephews," said I.

"Ah, but she's different from other aunts, and I'm different from other nephews. May I telegraph that she's to come?"

"I thought she was coming."

"I mean, may I telegraph that she's to be a chaperon? I ought to let her know. She might — er — want more dresses or bonnets, or something."

Phil and I laughed, and so did Mr. Starr. After that, of course, we couldn't be stony-hearted; besides, we didn't want to be. I could see that, even to Phil, the thought of a cruise taken in the company of our new friend and that ideal chaperon, his aunt, Lady MacNairne, had attractions which the idea of a cruise alone with her stepsister had lacked.

"Well, in the circumstances, I think we should be callous brutes not to say 'Yes,'" I replied.

"I don't want to force you into consenting from pure generosity," went on Mr. Starr. "If you'd like to consult your relations, and have them find out that I'm all right ——"

I laughed again. "I know you better than I do them," said I. "I've never seen them yet. I think we can take you on faith, just as you've taken our claims to the boat. Your Scotch aunt alone would be a guarantee, if we needed one. A Scotch aunt sounds so *extra* reliable. But perhaps my relatives may be of use in other ways, as they've lived in Rotterdam always, I fancy. They might even find us a skipper, if your negotiations fall through. Anyhow, I'll write a letter from our hotel to the head of the family, introducing myself as his long-lost cousin twice removed."

"What is your hotel, if I may ask?" inquired Mr. Starr.

I told him, and it turned out that it had been his till this very morning, when he had removed his things to "Lorelei," with the intention of living on board till he was ready to start. Now he proposed to have them taken back to the hotel, and rearranged on the barge when his aunt came. As for that sly old person, the caretaker, our new friend volunteered to

straighten out everything with him, our affair as well as his own.

"When he discovers that we can't be bothered having the law of him, as he richly deserves, he will remember his English, or I'll find the way to make him," said the young man in such a joyous, confident way, that thereupon I dubbed him our "lucky Starr."

IV

"HOW funny if I've got relations who can't speak any language except Dutch!" I said, after I'd sent a letter by messenger to the address of the Robert van Buren found in the directory.

But half an hour later an answer came back, in English. Mine very sincerely, Robert van Buren, would give himself the pleasure of calling on his cousin immediately. When I received this news it was one o'clock, and we were finishing lunch at the hotel, in the society of Mr. Starr, who had already wired to his aunt that she was to play the part of chaperon.

I read the letter aloud, and Phil and I decided that it sounded *old*.

"Mother spoke once or twice of father's cousin, Robert van Buren; so I suppose he's about the age my father would have been if he'd lived," I said. "I hope he'll not turn out a horror."

"I hope he'll not forbid you to associate with my aunt and me," cut in Mr. Starr. "It's a stiff kind of handwriting."

"He can't make me stiff," said I. "Cousins twice removed don't count — except when they can be useful."

"A gentleman in the reading-room to see you, miss," announced the waiter, who could speak English, handing me a card on a tray. It was a foreign-looking card, and I couldn't feel in the least related to it, especially as the "van" began with a little "v."

"Come and support me, Phil," I begged, glancing regretfully at a seductive bit of Dutch cheese studded with caraway seeds, which it would be rude to stop and eat.

It's rather an ordeal to meet a new relation, even if you tell yourself that you don't care what he thinks of you. I slipped behind Phil, making her enter the reading-room first, which gave me time to peep over her shoulder and fancy we had been directed wrongly. There was a man in the room, but he could not have been a man in the days when mother was speaking of "father's cousin." His expression only was old: it might have been a hundred. The rest of him could not be more than twenty-eight, and it was all extremely good-looking. If he were to turn out a cousin I should not have to be ashamed of him. He was like a big, handsome cavalryman, with a drooping mustache that was hay-colored, in contrast with a brown skin, and a pair of the solemnest gray eyes I've ever seen — except in the face of a baby.

"Are you Miss Van Buren?" this giant asked Phil gravely, holding out a large brown hand.

"No," said Phil, unwilling to take the hand under false pretenses.

It fell, and so did the handsome face, if anything so solemn could have become a degree graver than before.

"I beg your pardon," said the owner of both, speaking English with a Scotch accent. "I have made a deceit."

I laughed aloud. "I'm Helen Van Buren," I said. And I put out my hand.

His swallowed it up, and though I wear only one ring I could have shrieked. Yet his expression was not flattering. There are persons who prefer my style to Phil's, but I could see that he wasn't one of them. I felt he thought me garish; which was unjust, as I can't help it if my complexion is very white and very pink, my eyes and eyelashes rather dark, and my hair decidedly chestnut. I haven't done any of it myself, yet I believe the handsome giant suspected me, and was sorry that Phil was not Miss Van Buren.

"Are you my cousin Robert Van Buren's son?" I asked.

"I am the only Robert van Buren now living," he answered.

I longed to be flippant, and say that there were probably several dotted about the globe, if we only knew them; but I dared not, under those eyes — absolutely dared not. Instead, I remarked inanely that I was sorry to hear his father was not alive.

"He died many years ago. We have got over it," he replied. And I almost laughed again; but that angel of a Phil looked quite sympathetic.

In a few minutes we settled down more comfortably, with Phil and me on a sofa together, and Cousin Robert on a chair, which kept me in fits of anxiety by creaking and looking too small to hold him.

Phil and I held hands, as girls generally do when they are at all self-conscious, if they sit within a yard of each other; and we all began to talk in the absurd way of new-found relations, or people you haven't seen for a long time.

We asked Robert things, and he answered; and when we'd encouraged him a good deal, he asked us things too, looking mostly as Phyllis. At last we arrived at the information that he had a mother and two sisters, who spent the summers at Scheveningen, in a villa. Then fell a silence, which Phil tactfully broke by saying that she had heard of Scheveningen. It must be a beautiful place, and she'd been brought up with a cup that came from there. When she was good, as a child, she was allowed to play with it.

"I should think you were always good," said Cousin Robert. Phyllis blushed, and then he blushed too, under his brown skin. "I have also a fiancée at Scheveningen," he went on, à propos of nothing — unless of the blush.

"Is she a Dutch girl?" I asked.

"Oh yes."

"I suppose she is very pretty and charming?"

"I do not know. I am used to her. We have played together

when we were young. I go every Saturday to Scheveningen, when they are there, to stay till Monday."

"Oh!" said Phil.

"Oh!" said I.

Silence again. Then, "It was very good of you to come and see us so quickly after I wrote."

"It was my duty; and my pleasure too" (as second thought). "You must tell me your plans."

So we told them, and Cousin Robert did not approve. "I do not think it will do," said he, firmly.

"I'm afraid it must do," I returned, with equal firmness disguised under a smile.

Phil apologized for me as she gave me a squeeze of the hand.

"We've been very happy together, Nell and I," she explained, "but we have never had much excitement. This is our first chance, and — we shall be *well* chaperoned by Lady MacNairne."

"Yes; but she is the aunt of the stranger young man."

"Geniuses are never strangers. He is a genius," I said. "You've no idea how his Salon picture was praised."

"But his character. What do you know of that?"

"It's his aunt's character that matters most, and the MacNairnes are irreproachable."

(I had never heard the name until this morning, but there are some things which you seem to have been born knowing; and I was in a mood to stake my life upon Lady MacNairne.)

"It is better that you see my mother," said Cousin Robert.

"It will be sweet of her to call on us."

"I do not think she can do that. She it too large; and she does not easily move from Scheveningen. But if she writes you a note, to ask you and Miss Rivers, you will go, is it not?"

"With pleasure," I said, "if it isn't too far. You see, Lady MacNairne may arrive soon, and when she does ——"

"But now I will see my mother, and I will bring back the letter. I will drive with an automobile which a friend has lent me — Rudolph Brederode; and when you have read the note, you will both go in the car with me to Scheveningen to stay for all night, perhaps more."

"Oh, we couldn't think of staying all night," I exclaimed. "We'll stop here till ——"

"It is not right that you stop here. I will go now, and, please, you will pack up to be ready."

"We haven't unpacked yet," I said. "But we couldn't possibly — for one thing, your mother may not find it convenient."

My cousin Robert's jaw set. "She surely will find it convenient."

"What people you Dutch are!" the words broke from me.

He looked surprised. "We are the same like others."

"I think you are the same as you used to be hundreds of years ago, when you first began to do as you pleased; and I suppose you have been doing it ever since."

Cousin Robert smiled. "Maybe we like our own way," he admitted.

"And maybe you get it!"

"I hope. And now I will go to order the automobile." He glanced at his watch, an old-fashioned gold one. "In an hour and a quarter I will be at Scheveningen. Fifteen minutes there will be enough. Another hour and a quarter to come back. I will be for you at four."

"You don't allow any time for the motor to break down," I said.

"I do not hope that she will break down. She is a Dutch car."

"And serves a Dutch master. Oh no; certainly she won't break down."

He stared, not fully comprehending; but he did not pull his mustache, as an Englishman does, when he wonders if he is being chaffed. He shook hands with us gravely, and bowed

several times at the door. Then he was gone, and we knew that if he didn't come back at four with that letter from his mother, it would be because she — or the motor — was more Dutch than he.

When he disappeared, Phil and I went out into the garden for the sole purpose, we told each other, of having coffee; and when we saw Mr. Starr sitting with an empty cup and a cigarette, we both exclaimed, "Oh, are you here?" as if we were surprised; so I suppose we were.

He had caught a glimpse of Cousin Robert, and said what a splendid-looking fellow he was — a regular Viking; but when we agreed, he appeared depressed. "Oh, my prophetic soul!" he murmured. "The cousin will want his mother to go with you, and my poor aunt will be nowhere."

"His mother is too large for the boat," I assured him confidently. Mr. Starr brightened at this, but clouded again when he heard that Phil and I were to stop the night with my cousins.

"They will tear you away from me — I mean, from my aunt," he said.

I shook my head. "No. It's difficult to resist the Dutch, I find, when they want you to do anything; but when they want you *not* to do anything — why, that is too much. Your pride comes to the rescue, and you fight for your life. We'll *promise*, if you like; for your aunt's sake. Won't we, Phil?"

"Yes; for your aunt's sake," she echoed.

"We can depend upon you, then — my aunt and I?"

"Upon us and 'Lorelei.'"

"You're angels. My aunt will bless you. And now, would you care to look at the barge I've got the refusal of? If you're going to tow her, you ought to know what she's like. I don't think she'll put 'Lorelei' to shame, though, for she's good of her kind; belongs to a Dutch artist who's in the habit of living aboard, but he has a commission for work in France, this summer, and wants to let her. She's lying near by."

Who would have thought, when we arrived a few hours before, strangers in Rotterdam, that we would be sauntering about the town with an American young man, calmly making plans for a cruise in his society? I'm sure that if a palmist had contrived to capture Phil's virtuous little hand, and foretold any such events, my stepsister would have considered them as impossible as monstrous. Nevertheless, she now accepted the arrangements Fate made for her, as quietly as the air she breathed; for was not the figure of our future chaperon already hovering in the background, title and old Scotch blood and all, sanctifying the whole proceeding?

Phil was so enchanted with the barge (which turned out to be a sort of glorified Dutch sea-going house-boat) that she was fired with sudden enthusiasm for our cruise. And the thing really is a delectable craft — stout, with a square-shouldered bow, and a high, perky nose of brass, standing up in the air as one sees the beak of a duck sometimes, half-sunk among its feathers and pointing upward. "Waterspin" (which means "water-spider") is the creature's name, and she is a brilliant emerald, lined and painted round her windows with an equally brilliant scarlet. This bold scheme of color would be no less than shocking on the Thames; but, sitting in that olive-green canal, in a retired part of Rotterdam, "Waterspin" looked like a pleasing Dutch caricature of Noah's Ark.

Inside we found her equally desirable, with four little boxes of sleeping-rooms, yellow painted floors, and bunks curtained with hand-embroidered dimity, stiff as a frozen crust of snow; a studio, with a few charming bits of old painted Dutch furniture to redeem it from bareness, and a kitchen which roused all Phil's domestic instincts.

"Oh, the darling blue and white china, and brass things, and those adorable pewter pots!" she cried. "I love this boat. I could be quite happy living on her all the rest of my life."

We both exclaimed, "Oh, are you here?"

"So you shall! I mean, while she is mine you must consider yourselves as much at home on her as on your own boat," stammered Mr. Starr. "Or, if you'd rather take up your quarters on the barge ——"

"No, no. Nell and I will live on 'Lorelei'; but I do think, if you'll let me, I'll come sometimes and cook things in that heavenly kitchen."

"Let you? Whatever you make shall be preserved in amber."

"Wouldn't it be better to eat it?" asked Phil.

"Can you cook? I should as soon expect to see a Burne-Jones lady run down the Golden Stair into a kitchen ——"

"I can make delicious toast and tea-cakes and salad dressing — can't I, Nell? — and lots of other things."

"Pluperfect. I only wish I could. I shan't trouble your kitchen, Mr. Starr."

"But you can sing so beautifully, dear, and sketch, too; and your stories ——"

"Don't dare speak of them!" I glared; and poor Phil, unselfishly anxious to show off my accomplishments to Lady MacNairne's nephew, was silent and abashed. I hoped that Mr. Starr hadn't heard.

He was delighted with our approval of the barge, and enlarged upon the good times before us. No one could know Holland properly without seeing her from the waterways, he said, and we would know her by-and-by as few foreigners did. She could not hide a secret from us that was worth finding out. He hadn't planned any regular tour for himself; he had meant to wander here and there, as the fancy seized him; but now the route was for us to decide. Whatever pleased us would please him. As for his painting, you could hardly go round a corner in Holland without stumbling on a scene for a picture, and he should come across them everywhere; he had no choice of direction. But in seven or eight weeks we could explore the waterways pretty thoroughly. Our skipper would be able to

put us on the right track, and let us miss nothing. Had we, by-the-by, asked Mr. van Buren if he'd any skippers up his sleeve? Oh, well, it didn't matter that we'd forgotten. He himself had the names of several, besides some men he had already seen, and he would interview them all. It was certain that in a day or two at most, he could find exactly the right person for the place, and we might be sure that while we were away at Scheveningen he would not be idle in our common interests.

"After all, even *you* must admit that men are of some use," said Phil, when we were at the hotel again, waiting for Cousin Robert and his car "Supposing you'd had to organize the tour alone, as we expected, could you have done it?"

"Of course," I replied, bravely.

"What! and engaged a chauffeur and a skipper? Who would have told you what to do? I'm sure we could never have started without your cousin Robert and Mr. Starr."

"What has Cousin Robert got to do with it?" I demanded.

Phil reflected. "Now I come to think of it, I don't know exactly. But he is so *dependable;* and there's so much of him."

"I hope there won't be too much," said I.

"I like tall men," remarked Phil, dreamily. Then she looked at her watch. "It's five minutes to four. He ought to be here soon."

"He'll come inside ten minutes," I prophesied.

But he came in three. I might have known he would be before his time, rather than after. And he arrived with a nice letter from his mother.

Neither Phyllis nor I had ever been in a motor-car until we got gingerly into that one. I had heard her say that she would never thus risk her life; but she made no mention of this resolution to Cousin Robert. If she had, it would have been useless; for without doubt she would in the end have had to go; and it saved time not to demur.

V

THE car which stood throbbing at the door of the hotel was large and handsome, as if made to match my cousin, and it was painted flame color.

"I am just learning to drive," said Robert, who wore a motoring-cap which was particularly becoming. "I do not know much about automobiles yet; soon I shall buy one. It is rowing I like best, and skating in winter, though I have not time to amuse myself except at the end of weeks, for I am manager of my poor father's factory. But my fiancée likes the automobile, and to please her I am learning with my friend's car."

"That is good of you," said Phyllis.

"Yes, it is," he replied gravely. "Would you that I drive or the chauffeur? He has more experience."

I left the decision to Phil, as she is the timid one, but to my surprise she answered ——

"Oh, you, of course."

Cousin Robert looked pleased. "Are you not afraid?" he inquired, beaming.

"Ye — es, I am afraid, for I've never been before. But I shall be less afraid with you than with him." And she glanced at a weedy youth who was pouring oil from a long-nosed tin into something obscure.

"Will you sit in front by my side?" he asked. And it was only after Phil had accepted the invitation that he remembered to hope I wouldn't mind the chauffeur being in the *tonneau* with me. "It must have been one of you," he added, "and you and I are cousins."

"Twice removed," I murmured; but he was helping Phil into the car, and did not hear.

It was a wild moment when we started. But it would have looked odd to cling to the chauffeur for protection, so I did nothing; and it calmed me to see how Phyllis bore herself. She didn't even grasp the arm of the seat; she merely gazed up into Cousin Robert's face with a sweetly feminine look, which said, "My one hope is in you, but I trust you utterly." It was enough to melt the heart of a stone giant, even when seen through goggles. I had an idea that this giant was not made of stone, and I wondered what the fiancée of my cousin twice removed was made of.

After the first thrill of starting, when we seemed to be tearing like a tailless comet through a very small portion of space not designed to hold comets, I grew happy, though far from tranquil. I can't imagine people ever feeling really tranquil in an automobile, and I don't believe they do, though they may pretend. I'm sure I should not, even if I became a professional chauffeur, which heaven forbid. But part of the enjoyment came through not feeling tranquil. There was a savage joy in thinking every instant that you were going to be dashed to pieces, or else that you would dash somebody else to pieces, while all the time you knew in your heart that nothing of the sort would happen.

The car went splendidly, and I believe I should have guessed it was a Dutch one, even if Cousin Robert hadn't told me; it made so little noise, yet moved so masterfully, and gave an impression of so much reserve power. Indeed, I might have thought out several nice similes if there hadn't been quantities of trams and heavy drays blundering about, or if the inhabitants of Rotterdam had not had a habit of walking in large family groups in the middle of the street. The big horn through which Robert every now and again blew a mournful blast, was confusing when it arrived in the midst of an

idea; and a little curved thing (like the hunting-horn of old pictures) into which the chauffeur occasionally mewed, was as disconcerting to my nerves as to those of the pedestrians who hopped out of the way.

The more we saw of Rotterdam, the more extraordinary did the city appear, and the more did I wonder that people should refer to it merely as a port.

"It is not a bad town," Robert said to Phyllis, in the half-fond, half-deprecating way in which, when talking to strangers, we allude to that spot of earth we happen to inhabit. "I would not change to live at The Hague, though the diplomatic set give sneers at us and call us commercial."

"Just as Edinburgh sneers at Glasgow," cut in Phil.

"Yes, like that. I have been much to Scotland on my business, and I know," answered Robert. "But we have many good things to show strangers, if they would look; pictures, and museums, and old streets; but it is not fashionable to admire Rotterdam. You should see the Boompjes at night, when the lights shine in the water. It is only a big dyke, but once it was the part where the rich people lived, and those who know about such things say the old houses are good. And I should like you to see where I live with my mother and sisters. It is an old house, too, in a big garden, with a pond and an island covered with flowers. But we do not pass now, so you must see it a future day."

To say all this, Cousin Robert had to yell above the roar of traffic on the stone pavements; but by-and-by, as town changed into country, we left the stones behind and came into the strangest road I have ever seen. It ran beside a little river — the Schie — which looked like a canal, and it was made of neat, purplish-brown bricks, laid edge to edge.

"Klinker, we call it," said Cousin Robert. "It's good for driving; never much dust or mud; and when you motor it

gives grip to the 'pneus.' It wouldn't do for us of the Netherlands to leave our roads bare."

"Why, what would happen?" I bent toward him to ask. "Would the bottom of Holland drop out?"

"I think yes," he replied, seriously. "The saying is that there has been as much of sand laid on the road between Rotterdam and The Hague as would reach the top of the cathedral spire at Amsterdam, which you will see one day."

"Dear me, and yet it's so low and flat, now," soliloquized Phil. "Lower than the canals."

"It is nothing here to some places. We work hard to save the country we have made with our hands, we Netherlanders. All the streets and gardens of Rotterdam, and other towns too, sink down and down; but we are used to that. We do not stop to care, but go to work adding more steps up to the houses, so we can get in at our doors."

"I think you are wonderful," said Phyllis.

"I have not done very much myself," modestly replied Cousin Robert.

"But you would if necessary. I'm sure you'd have been like the little boy who saw the trickle of water coming out of the dyke, and put his thumb ——"

"Phil, if you bring up that story I'll ask Cousin Robert van Buren to run into a windmill and kill you," I shrieked over her shoulder.

"But I would not do that," said he. Oh yes, he really was wonderful, my cousin Robert.

"There is a spot to interest an American," he deigned to fling a sop to me, nodding vaguely upward at some roofs on the River Maas. "Did you ever hear of Oude Delftshaven, cousin? But I don't suppose you have."

"Indeed I have!" I shrieked at him. "I wouldn't be a true descendant of Knickerbocker stock if I hadn't. On July 22, 1620, some Pilgrim Fathers (I'm not sure whether they were

fathers then or afterwards) set sail from Oude Delftshaven for America."

(I didn't think it necessary to explain that, Knickerbocker as I was, I had absorbed this fact only the other day in "reading up" Holland.)

I was still more inclined to be reticent as to the newness of my knowledge when it appeared that Phil knew something of a poem on the subject by Mrs. Hemans. I could not allow my English stepsister to be better informed than I concerning a country which I already began to regard as a sort of confiscated family estate that ought to have been mine.

We were going fast now, so fast that the tears came to my eyes as the sweet-scented breeze rushed against my lashes.

"There's Schiedam," said Robert, indicating a town that stood up darkly out of the green plain. "You know, they make the famous 'Geneva' there."

We had never heard of Geneva in liquid form, but it appeared that "Geneva" or "Hollands" and gin were all the same thing; and Cousin Robert seemed almost offended when I said it was nice, with hot water and sugar, for a cold in the head.

I don't know whether the little Schie is really an idyllic stream, or whether the glamor of that azure day was upon it for me, but our first "waterway" seemed exquisite, as we spun along through country of wide horizons and magic atmosphere.

There were pretty houses, with balconies screened with roses — cataracts of roses, yellow, and pink, and white. We flew by lawns like the lawns of England, and thick, dark patches of forest, where the sun rained gold. There were meadows where a red flame of poppies leaped among the wheat, and quenched their fire in the silver river of waving grain. There were other meadows, green and sunny, where cows were being milked into blue pails lined with scarlet; and there were bowery tea-gardens divided into snug little arbors for two,

where each swain could woo his nymph unseen by the next-door swain and nymph, though all couples were in sight from the river.

"Now we're coming to Delft," said Robert, long before I thought that we could be near that ancient town. "If Rudolph Brederode, who lends me this car, were here, he could tell much about the history," my cousin went on, mentioning his friend for the second time, as if with pride. "He is the sort of fellow who knows all the things to know, though he is a great sportsman, too. I never took interest in history, but William the Silent is our hero, so even I know of him and Delft. It was at Oude Delft he was murdered."

"He was one of my heroes when I was a little girl," said I. "I can recall my father telling splendid stories about him — as good as fairy tales. The best was about the way he earned the nickname of William the Silent."

I gazed with interest at the place where one of the greatest figures in the history of the world had lived and died.

A shady, lovable old town it seemed. We drove into a pleasant street, which looked so clear and green, from the mirror of its canal to the Gothic arch of its close arbor of fragrant lime-trees, that it was like a tunnel of illuminated beryl. The extraordinary brilliance of the windows added to the jewel-like effect. Each pane was a separate glittering square of crystal, and the green light flickered and glanced on the quaint little tilted spying-mirrors in which Dutch ladies see the life of the streets, themselves unseen.

The houses were of brown or purplish brick, with curiously ornamented doorways, the stucco decorations running in wavy lines up to the level of the first story windows; the door-steps white as pearl in the green glimmer; but there was nothing striking in the way of architecture until we swept into sight of an old Gothic building, blazing with colored coats-of-arms, ancient and resplendent.

"That's the Gemeenlandshuis van Delfsland," said Cousin Robert, with a beautiful confidence in our comprehension; and then, slowing down the car before a dark, high wall, with a secretive-looking door in the midst, "Here's the Prinzenhof, where William the Silent lived, and where Balthazar Gérard killed him."

"Oh," I exclaimed, as he was driving on, "can't we stop — can't we go in?"

"We could, but — I should not like to make us late for dinner," Cousin Robert demurred.

"Dinner? Why, it's ages before dinner, and ——"

"We dine at half-past five," said he.

Phil and I gazed at each other with lifted eyebrows. Phil was pale, and I felt a sudden constriction of the throat. The idea of eating dinner at the hour when our souls cried for tea and toast, was little short of ghastly. Noblesse obliged us to conceal our loathing, but I did venture meekly to suggest that if we drove faster afterwards perhaps we might spare a few minutes for the Prinzenhof.

"There are things in The Hague you will want to stop for, too," said Robert. "But my sisters and I can bring you to see the pictures, and the Royal Palace and the Huis ten Bosch to-morrow; besides, I remember my mother meant to put off dinner for us until six, so we will, maybe, not be too late."

One should be thankful for the smallest mercies; and I hoped that the craving for tea might have subsided into callous resignation by six. What Phil, as a born Englishwoman, must have been feeling, I could easily conceive; and it was a pity this shock to her system had arrived on our first day, for only just before the blow she had said that Holland seemed too enchanting: she was glad, after all, that she had come, and would like to learn the language.

Luckily, Cousin Robert had remembered the change in the domestic program before it was too late, otherwise I am sure

he would have denied us the Prinzenhof, and we should have had to sneak back by ourselves to-morrow. As it was we were allowed to have our own way, practically for the first time since we came to Holland.

Robert rang a bell, and a man appeared, who let us into the courtyard, more like the courtyard of a monastery than a palace; and among the historical dust-motes which clung to Cousin Robert's memory was the fact that the place actually had been a monastery, sacred to St. Agatha.

We crossed the courtyard, and just inside another door found ourselves on the scene of the great tragedy.

I knew it by instinct, before anybody told me; for suddenly the whole story came back just as I heard it from my father, not as I've read it in books of history. So vividly did he paint each detail, that I used to grow hysterical in my infantine way, and he was scolded by mother for "filling the child's mind with horrors."

Yes, there was the stairway, with the pale light coming from the low window; there was the white wall which had been spattered with the hero's life blood; there was the open door of the dining-hall where he had been carried back to die; there the white pillar behind which the murderer crouched, and there the dark archway through which Gérard had run, his heart beating thickly with the hope of escape, and the thought of the horse waiting beyond the ramparts and the moat.

I fancied I could see the prince, handsome still, in the fashion of dress he affected, since the days of the Water Beggars' fame. A stately figure in his rough and wide-brimmed hat, with the silk cord of the Beggars round the felt crown; and I could almost smell the smoke from the murderer's pistol, bought with the money William's generosity had given. There were the holes in the wall made by the poisoned bullets. How real it all seemed, how the centuries between slipped

away! Let me see, what had the date been? I ought to remember. July ——

"Phil, what day of the month is this?" I demanded with a start.

Phil turned at the open door of the dining-hall, which I could see had been made into a museum.

"July tenth," she answered promptly; for you can never catch Phil tripping as to a date, or a day of the week, even if you should shake her out of her first sleep to ask.

"Then it's the anniversary of his death!" I exclaimed. "July 10, 1584, it was. How strange we should have come on the very day! It makes it seem a pilgrimage."

"I don't find it strange," said Cousin Robert. "Many people come every day of the year."

Having thus poured the cold water of common sense on my sentiment, he dragged us into the dining-hall museum to see relics of William, and I should have been resentful, had not my eyes suddenly met other eyes looking down from the wall. They were the eyes of William the Silent himself when he was young — painted eyes, yet they spoke to me.

I don't know how fine that portrait may be as a work of art, but it is marvelously real. I understood in a moment why little, half-deformed Anna of Saxony had been so mad to marry him; I knew that, in her place, I should have overcome just as many obstacles to make that dark, haunting face the face of my husband.

Of course I've often read that William of Orange was a handsome man, as well as a dashing and extravagant gallant in his young days, but never till now had I realized how singularly attractive he must have been. The face in the portrait was sad, and as thoughtful as if he had sat to the artist on the day he heard the dreadful secret of the fate which Philip of Spain and Francis of France were plotting for the Netherlands, the day that decided his future, and gave him his name

of "William the Silent." Yet in spite of its melancholy, almost sternness, it won me as no pictured face of a man ever did before.

"This is a great day for me," I said to Phil, who was close behind; "not only am I seeing Holland for the first time, but I've fallen in love with William the Silent."

I laughed as I made this announcement, though I was half in earnest; and turning to see whether I had shocked Cousin Robert, I found him in conversation with a tall, black-haired young man, near the door.

The man — he wore a gray suit, and carried a straw hat in his hand — had his back to me, and I remembered having seen the same back in the museum before we came in. Now he was going out, and evidently he and Cousin Robert had recognized each other as acquaintances. As I looked, he turned, and I saw his face. It was so like the face of the portrait that I felt myself grow red. How I did hope he hadn't overheard that silly speech!

For a moment his eyes and mine met as mine had met the eyes of the portrait. Then he shook hands with Robert and was gone.

"Very odd," said my cousin the giant, strolling toward us again, "that was Rudolph Brederode. And," he glanced at me, "his nickname among his friends is William the Silent."

"Why?" I asked, pretending unconsciousness.

"Don't you think there is a likeness?"

"I'm bad at seeing likenesses," said I.

"Why, Nell, I don't think you are," Phil defended me against myself. "You're always seeing the strangest resemblances between clouds and animals, and plants and people, and there's no end to what you find on wall papers. This very day you thought Mr. Starr like Robert Louis Stevenson, though I ——"

"That's when my imagination's running loose," I explained. "Cousin Robert is talking about facts."

"Oh!" said Phil.

"It's rather an ugly portrait," I went on; "I don't suppose William of Orange was like it one bit."

"But we have two reasons for calling Brederode the Taciturn," said Robert. "He has a way to keep still about things which other people discuss. Sometimes it makes men angry, but especially the ladies. Brederode does not care what others think; he descends from the great Brederode, but he is different."

"The Water Beggar was brave," I remarked.

"Rudolph is brave," retorted Cousin Robert, firing up. "You will think so to-morrow."

"What is he going to do?" I asked. "Something to startle Holland?"

"Holland has seen him do it before, but you have not. You will see him ride better than any one else in the jumping contests at the *Concours Hippique* at Scheveningen. It will be a fine show, but Brederode and his horses will be the best. My mother has a box. She will take you."

"But I thought you were going to take us to The Hague and the Huis ten Bosch?"

"That will be in the early morning. Perhaps my sisters will go; and after we have finished the pictures at The Hague, we will meet my mother and my fiancée, Freule Menela van der Windt, at the race grounds about two, and the show will not be over till seven, so dinner will be late."

"You Dutch are a strong race," I murmured.

"Brederode says he always comes here when he's anywhere in the neighborhood, for a look at the Prinzenhof on the tenth of July," Robert went on. "Odd, is it not?"

"No more odd than that we should have been here," said

I. But I said this in a low voice; and it's only a man who is in love with a girl who hears her when she mutters.

"He asked how the automobile was going, and I mentioned one or two things that bothered me, so he has gone out to talk to the chauffeur," Cousin Robert continued, unable to turn his thoughts from his Admirable Crichton. "Don't you think you've seen enough? It is late; and when I told Brederode I was showing Delft to my American cousin and an English friend, he said I must take you to the New Church, the tomb of William, and of Hugo Grotius. He wanted you to go to the Old Church too, and see the place where van Tromp lies, but we shall not have time. Besides, it would not please Miss Rivers."

"Why not?" asked Phyllis, large-eyed.

"You are English, and the English do not like to remember that Holland, through van Tromp, swept them off the seas —"

"Oh, I remember, he stuck up a broom on the mast," cut in Phil. "But it was long ago."

"How is it that the tombs of William and Grotius can be in a *new* church?" I reflected aloud.

"It is newer than the other, for it was founded in thirteen hundred and something," said Cousin Robert; "I suppose you ought to see it, even if dinner should be late. For, as Brederode says, 'Delft is the heart of Holland, and the New Church is the core of that heart.' It is for us what your Westminster Abbey is to you, Miss Rivers."

We went out from the old convent palace with its arched windows and narrow doors into the gold and green light of the Delft afternoon. In the street outside the courtyard stood the automobile, and the chauffeur was polishing something on it (people in Holland seem always to be polishing something, if they are obliged to stand still for a moment), but Mr. Rudolph Brederode, alias William the Silent, had vanished, and I was glad.

We got into the motor-car again, passing with every few yards some beautiful old building. But one thing in Delft disappointed me; I saw no storks, and I expected the air to be dark with storks.

"I don't think there are any now," said Robert, apologetically, "though Brederode would know."

"Isn't it true that the stork's the patron saint of Delft?" I asked. "Wasn't it here you had the fire which nearly ruined the city, hundreds of years ago, and the parent storks wouldn't leave their babies, but died covering them up with their wings? And didn't Holland take the stork, after that, for a kind of —of motto for the whole country because it was so brave and faithful?"

"Yes," Robert admitted, "Delft is not tired of storks, but storks are tired of Delft. You can offer them nice nests on long poles, and all kinds of inducements, to live in a certain place, but unless they choose, you cannot make them do anything."

"Ah, *now* I know why the Dutch have canonized storks!" I exclaimed.

And just then we arrived at the New Church, which looked inconceivably old, and inside was like a vast prison. But the tomb of black and white marble was fine, almost too fine, too much encrusted with ornament to perpetuate the memory of William the Silent. Still, I felt a thrill as I stood looking at the white, recumbent figure of the man who made Holland, and altered the face of Europe, resting so quietly after the storms of life, with his dog at his feet — the loyal little beast who saved him at Malines, and starved to death in the end, rather than live on in a dull world empty of its master.

I lingered for many minutes, remembering the eyes of the portrait, so warm with life and power, and Phil had to come and lead me away to the tomb of Hugo Grotius, the "miracle of Europe." Even Robert grew warm on the subject of

Grotius, and put him ahead of Pitt, as the youthful prodigy of the world. What had he left unaccomplished when he was eighteen? And what story had ever been written by Dumas, or any other, to compare with his in melodramatic interest? I didn't know enough details of the brilliant being's history to argue (although I have always the most intense yearning to argue with Cousin Robert), but I made a note to read them up, in case I should ever be called upon to write a historical novel at short notice.

Robert discouraged Phil from buying the ware of Delft on its native heath, and we spun along twice as fast in leaving the town as we had in coming, either because a Dutchman's dinner-hour is sacred, or because this particular Dutchman was anxious to exchange our society for that of his fiancée. We flew over the smooth klinker road at such a rate that, had it been England, a policeman would have sprung from every bush. Nobody seemed to mind here, however; and the few horses we met had the air of turning up their noses at us, despite the physical difficulty in evoking that expression on an equine profile.

The country grew prettier. It was the sort of landscape old-fashioned artists used to produce out of their abundant imagination, scorning to be tied down by models, dashing in anything charming or *outré* which they happened to think of at the moment, and jumbling together an extravagant whole too good to be true. But there were only a few miles of it left after Delft: and we hadn't reveled in impossibly delicious farm-yards and supernaturally bowery gardens half long enough, when we ran into the outskirts of The Hague —"S. Gravenhage," as I love to call it to myself.

Until this moment, I'd been mentally patronizing Holland, admiring it, and wondering at it, of course, but half-consciously saying that quaintness, snugness, and historical interest were all we could expect of the Low Country. Elegance and

beauty of form we mustn't look for: but I found myself surrounded by it in The Hague. There were streets of tall, brown palaces, far finer than the royal dwelling which Robert pointed out; the shops made me long to spring from the car and spend every penny set apart for the tour; the Binnenhof — that sinister theater of Dutch history — with its strangely grouped towers and palaces, and its huge squares, made me feel an insignificant insect with no right to opinions of any kind; and as I gazed up at the dark, medieval buildings, vague visions of Cornelis and John de Witt in their torture, of van Oldenbarneveld, and fair Adelaide de Poelgust stabbed and bleeding, flitted fearfully through my brain. I wanted to get out and look for the stone where Adelaide had fallen to die (how well I remembered that story, told in twilight and firelight by my father!), and only the set of Robert's shoulders deterred me. What was a romantic fragment of history, compared to the certainty that the roast would be overdone?

But when we swept into the green-gold dusk of the forest, I forgot such trivialities as buildings made by man.

Suddenly we were in a different world, an old, old world, with magic that lurked in each dusky vista, breathed from the perfume of leaf and fern, and whispered in the music of the trees, as if we had strayed upon the road that leads to fairyland.

"Fancy seeing fairyland from the motor-car!" I said to myself. "I never thought to go in such a fashion, though I've been sure that one day or another I would find the way there through such a forest as this."

I felt that, if I walked here alone, I might see something more mysterious than alder-trees, than giant beeches, and ancient oaks; than glints of flower-strewn waters shining out of shadow in green darkness deep and cool; than rustic bridges twined with creepers, or kiosks glimmering at the end of long, straight alleys. I should have seen processions of dim figures;

chanting Druids and their victims; wild, fierce warriors, and blue-eyed women, their white arms and the gold of their long hair shining through the mist of centuries.

But then, I was in the motor-car: and though Robert, in a different and more sketchy costume, would have been a gallant Batavian warrior, there would be a certain indecorousness in permitting my fancy to make the necessary changes. I had to content myself, therefore, with things as they were; with the teuf-teuf of the automobile instead of the wild wailing of white-robed Druids, and with the coming and going of modern carriages under the shadowy branches, instead of strange chariots of bygone kings.

After all, we did not find fairy-land but merely villa-land, when we flashed out from the mysterious heart of the forest; but the villas were charming, scattered in the woods, ringed with flowery lawns, and not one without a huge veranda like a garden-room, fitted up with so many cushioned sofas, easy-chairs, and little tables, that it was clear the family life was lived there.

"I do hope my Dutch cousin's house at Scheveningen is as pretty as these," I said to myself. "It would be delicious to visit in a garden-room"; but presently we slipped out of the shade into sunlight, and were in a town of brick streets, huge hotels, with flags all a-flutter in a spanking, salt-smelling breeze, gay little shops and houses such as grow up by the sea. It was Scheveningen.

I blinked in the blaze of sunlight which tore open the green veil of dusk, and the air, though tingling with ozone, felt hot after the depths of the forest.

Not a flower, not a garden was to be seen, yet Scheveningen was a flower-garden of color in itself. Where the color came from you could scarcely say, yet it struck at your eyes from all directions. Flags flamed, roofs were red as beds of geraniums; or else they were green, or else they were vivid yellow. The

hotels were of quaint design, with a suggestion of the Oriental; the shops had covered galleries, and the people moving in the big, circular *place* into which we drove — the *place* of the Kurhaus and of the circus — were drifting particles of the bright mosaic; tall, dark young officers (not at all typically Dutch according to preconceived ideas) in green and crimson or bright blue uniforms; pretty girls in white with rose-trimmed or scarlet hats; nursemaids in the costume of some remote province, the sunlight setting their gold head-ornaments on fire; tiny children in blue sailor-suits, or with a little red fez on a yellow head; old, white-haired gentlemen holding on unsuitable top-hats as they walked against the wind; white-aproned waiters flitting about restaurant verandas, carrying pink ices, or baskets of fruit, like jewels.

It was a gay scene, but Robert said it was nothing to the "high season," which began on the first of August, and brought throngs of fashionable people from all over Europe. As for the top-hats at which I laughed, he defended them stoutly, saying they were as much *de rigueur* at The Hague as in London, and he could see nothing comic in wearing them at the seaside.

Still we had had no glimpse of the sea; but Robert turned the car, and driving between two gigantic hotels, ran down to a beach with sands of gleaming gold, and a background of wind-blown dunes billowing away as far as the eye could reach. The very wildness of this background gave a bizarre sort of charm to the fantastic buildings which made up the fashionable center of Scheveningen.

In the center, the Kurhaus dominated all; hotel, restaurant, concert-room, theater, in one. Terrace below terrace it descended and sent out into the green water of the North Sea a great pier blossoming with flags. But the most individual feature was the large and enterprising family of "wind stoels" — dear, cozy basket-houses for one, like green and yellow beehives cut in half, or giant sunbonnets crowding the beach

behind the bathing-machines. There one could nestle, self-contained as a hermit-crab in a shell, defying east wind or baking sun, happy with a book, or the person one liked best in a twin wind-stoel opposite.

Reposeful gaiety seemed at this first glance to be the note struck by Scheveningen, and the air was buoyant as I had never known air to be before.

"If you visit us in August," said Robert, "you will hear the best operas, see the best automobile races, the most exciting motor-boat races ——"

"But we shall be on our own motor-boat in August," said I.

"I do not think so. You will perhaps let your boat. We will talk to my mother," Robert answered, as one soothes a fractious child. Then, before I had breath to answer, he swept us away from the beach, and drew up before an aggressively comfortable villa on a terrace opening to the sea.

VI

THERE was a garden-room with flower-painted walls, and Japanese furniture and silk things; and in the garden-room stood Cousin Robert's mother. The great glass doors were wide open, and she moved slowly to the threshold to meet us.

Yes, she is far too large to come and call upon a stranger; far, far too large for the motor-boat.

I saw in a flash why Robert put the family dinner-hour before the most important historical events which helped to make Holland. If his jaw is square enough, his gray eyes piercing enough to make his mother feel it convenient to entertain unknown guests, whatever her plans and inclinations, there's no doubt that her personality is more than commanding enough to exact respect for domestic arrangements.

It would need such a giant as Robert not to be overawed by her, outside domestic matters; and as for myself, though her pretty, smooth gray hair parts in the middle, and her cheeks grew as pink as a baby's when she smiled and told me in nice English to call her "Cousin Cornelia," I knew that if she said black were white I would instantly agree with her.

There are glass doors between the garden-room and a drawing-room behind. They were closed, because the Dutch (I am already learning) like to draw a firm dividing line between being in the house and in the open air; and I could see through the glass a half-length, life-size portrait of a humorous little brown gentleman, who was, no doubt, Cousin Cornelia's late husband, and Robert's father. Taking this for granted, it's evident that Robert gets his inches and his blond

splendor of looks from his mother. There was so much of Cousin Cornelia in her black and white spotted muslin, that at first I was conscious of her presence alone. It was only her rich voice (like Devonshire cream, all in soft lumps when the English words were difficult) introducing "Freule Menela van der Windt, and your two cousins, Lisbeth and Lilli," which made me aware that others were present.

I turned to the fiancée first, and found her a dark, thin, near-sighted girl, with eye-glasses that pinched her nose, and perhaps her temper as well, for there isn't a line of her face which won't be cross-grained when she is old. She looked hard through her glasses at me and at Phil, taking stock of us both, and didn't offer to shake hands; but Lisbeth and Lilli, adorable strawberry-and-cream girls, twins of fifteen or sixteen, put out dimpled fingers.

Cousin Cornelia asked how we liked Holland, but without waiting for us to answer, told off Lisbeth and Lilli to show us our room, as there was only just time to wash away the dust of motoring.

I was awestruck by Cousin Cornelia, and depressed by Menela; still I hugged the thought that we were in luck to see the inside of a Dutch home, and determined to make the most of our experience, which may not occur again.

I never supposed it possible for the interior of a house to shine as this does. Everything shines, even things that no one expects to present a polished surface. For instance, does anybody (not Dutch) call upon walls to behave as if they were mirrors? Yet as I went up the rather steep stairs of the Villa van Buren I could see each movement I made, each rise and fall of an eyelash repeated on a surface of brilliantly varnished walnut.

"What wonderful wood!" I exclaimed.

"It is not real. It is paint," said pretty Lisbeth. "Do you not have walls like this?"

"Never," I replied.

"Every one does in Holland. We admire them," explained Lilli.

"But what a lot of work to keep them so bright."

"It is only done once a day," she said apologetically. "The servant does it when she has finished the windows."

"What — all the windows in the house — every day?"

"How else would they be clean?" asked Lisbeth, surprised.

There was no answer to this, from a Dutch point of view, so I remarked meekly that it must take all the servant's time.

"It is what they like," said Lilli. "But we have another woman for the floors and beating out the rugs, and doing the brass, so it is not so much."

"Floors and rugs and brass every day, too?"

"Of course," returned both girls together, as if I had asked them about their baths or their tooth-brushes. "*Of course.*"

Lisbeth opened the door of a front room on the second floor.

"This is the spare room," said she, and advanced cautiously through the dusk caused by the closing of the shutters. "We keep them so in the afternoon," she explained, "because of the sunshine."

"Yes, otherwise the room would be hot, I suppose?"

"We do not mind its being hot. It is because the sun would fade the carpet and the curtains." She threw open the blinds as she spoke, but carefully shut both windows again.

"Oh, mayn't we have them open?" I ventured to ask. "The air is lovely."

"If you like," my cousin replied. "Only, if you do, the sand may blow in."

"Just at the top then."

"At the top? I have not seen a window that opens at the top. We do not have them made so."

"How funny! But I suppose there must be a reason why

a whole nation should go on having windows that won't open at the top."

"I do not know, except that we have always had them like that, so probably it is better to go on," said Lilli, after a few seconds' reflection, during which she looked exceedingly charming. She and Lisbeth made no attempt at having figures, but their faces are perfect, and their long tails of hair are fair and glossy as the silk of American corn.

When the twins left us to our own devices, I was for simply washing hands and faces; but Phil fiercely tore off her blouse, and made herself pink with the effort of unearthing another from our box.

"What does it matter about changing?" I asked. "There's no time, and they don't expect it. Besides, our things are as good as theirs — except Miss van der Windt's. *She's* very smart — to make up for her plainness."

"That's just the point," said Phil, struggling into a white, medallioned blouse that fastened as intricately as the working of a prize puzzle. "I've taken *such* a dislike to her, and she to us."

"How do you know?"

"I can't tell how. But I do know. And I want our frocks to be prettier than hers. *Do* change, like a pet. I'll hook you up, if you'll do me. Come, you *might*. You *would* bring me abroad."

"Oh, all right!"

So I changed. And by dint of supernatural speed we were ready to leave our green-and-pink doll's bedroom just as a Japanese gong moaned an apology for supplying us with dinner instead of tea.

Once in a "blue moon" Phil and I are invited by some one to dine at the Carlton or the Savoy, or at houses where the dinners are long and elaborate; but memories of those dinners pale before the reality of this at the Villa van Buren, in a handsome, shut-up dining-room.

There were *hors d'oeuvres*, and shell fish, and soup, and another kind of fish; and after that began a long procession of meat and birds, cooked in delicious, rich sauces. There were so many that I lost count, as Noah must when he stood at the ark door to receive the animals as they came along, two by two; but these were a little easier to keep track of, because you could remind yourself by saying: "That was the one done up in currant juice; that was the one with compote of cherries," and so on; which, of course, Noah couldn't.

Phil's capacity and mine was exhausted comparatively early in the feast, but everybody else was eating steadily on, so we dared not refuse a course, lest it should be considered rude in Holland. We did our best, straight through to a wonderful iced pudding, and managed a crumb of spiced cheese; but when raw currants appeared, we had to draw the line. The others called them "bessen," pulling the red beads off their stems with a fork, and sprinkling them with sugar, but my blood curdled at the sight of this dreadful fruit, and my mouth crinkled up inside.

Although we sat down at six, it was after eight when we rose, and as the windows were shut, the room was suffocating. Everybody looked flushed, and I dared not hope, after excluding the air for so long, that we should be allowed a breath of it later. But Cousin Cornelia, as a matter of course, led the way into the garden-room, where lamps, shaded with rose-colored silk, had now been lighted on two of the book- and magazine-strewn tables.

The strong air of the sea blew blessedly upon us, seeming cold after the heat of the dining-room, but Cousin Cornelia did not even wrap a shawl about her shoulders. We were *out-of-doors* now, and it was right to have air, so you took it for granted, and did not suffer. But indoors, what were windows for if you did not keep them closed? It seemed a waste of good material, and therefore a tempting of

Providence to take revenge by sending you bronchitis or rheumatism.

It was exquisite in the garden-room. Sea and sky mingled in a haze of tender blue. All the air was blue, spangled with the lights of the pier; and our lamps, and the shaded lamps of other garden-rooms, glowed in the azure dusk like burning flowers, roses, and daffodils, and tulips.

We had coffee in cups small and delicate as egg-shells, and the old silver spoons were spoons for dolls or fairies.

Robert asked if we would like to go to the circus, which could not, he said, be surpassed in Europe; or to a classical concert at the Kurhaus: but we were contented in the garden-room, with the music of the sea. We talked of many things, and if Robert is deficient in a knowledge of history, the others make up for his ignorance. They know something of everything; and even the apple-blossom twins could put Phyllis and me to shame, if they were not too polite, on the subject of modern musicians and painters.

They speak French, German, and Italian, as well as English: a smattering of Spanish too; yet they said modestly, when we exclaimed at their accomplishments, that it was nothing; hardly anybody would learn Dutch, so the Dutch must learn the languages of other nations.

As for Freule Menela (I must not call her "Miss," it seems, because "Freule" is a kind of title) she is the cleverest of all, as the sweet twins tried to make us understand; and the pretty creatures are proud of her, thinking little of their own beauty. Sometimes I fancied that a shade of contempt passed over her face when Robert ventured a remark which showed him more accomplished as sportsman than scholar; but, if she noticed that he turned to Phil or me with any brightening of interest, she at once took pains to engage his attention.

They talked in low, pleasant voices, scarcely raising their tones or making a gesture; and there was always that faint

suggestion of the Scotch accent, whether they spoke English or broke into Dutch. When I remarked upon it, Cousin Cornelia laughed and said it was perhaps the common Celtic ancestry; and that if the Dutch heard Gaelic talked, they could recognize a few words here and there.

It was not more than an hour after we finished our coffee, that tea was brought, with more beautiful china, and a great deal of handsome silver. What with this potent mixture of stimulants, and being in a new house, and thinking exciting thoughts of the future, I felt I shouldn't be able to sleep. Nevertheless, after we'd said good-night, and Phil and I were undressing, I was not pleased when Cousin Cornelia knocked at the door.

"She has come about the motor-boat," I thought, "to tell us we oughtn't to go. Heaven grant me strength to resist." For in her quilted Japanese silk dressing-gown she looked larger and more formidable than ever.

Not a word did she say about the motor-boat at first. It was our past which seemed to interest her, not our future. As a relation she has the right to ask me things about myself, and Phil's history is inextricably tangled up with mine.

She wanted to know where we lived in London, and how: also on what, though she didn't put it as crudely as that. I was frank, and told her about my serial stories and Phil's typing.

"I suppose you think we're mad to break up our work and go on a motor-boat tour in Holland, as if we were millionaires, when really we're poor girls," I said, before she had time to reprove us. "But we have each about a hundred and twenty pounds a year, whatever happens, so it isn't as desperate as you might think. Besides, it is going to be *the* time of our lives. Even my stepsister feels so now, though she was against it at first, and neither of us would give it up for anything."

"I don't think you should give it up," said Cousin Cornelia.

You might have knocked me down with a feather — quite a small one: for in her note she had said we must come and let her offer us good advice before it was too late; and Robert had hinted that his mother meant to dissuade us from our wild-goose chase — in the company of Mr. Starr and Mr. Starr's aunt.

"I think you know how to take care of yourselves," she went on.

"And we'll have a chaperon," Phil assured her.

"So I have heard, from my son. I have great faith in the Scotch. Yes, as you have been a little too kind-hearted, and promised this strange young man, it is necessary that somebody should have an aunt. Otherwise, if you two had been quite alone together, it would not so much have mattered. In Holland girls have liberty, more than anywhere except in America. The bicycle is their chaperon, for all young girls and men bicycle with us. The motor-boat might have been your chaperon. Even if the aunt should not come, perhaps the nephew could be got rid of, and a way arranged, rather than give up your tour."

We were delighted, and I could have hugged Cousin Cornelia. Indeed, I did thank her warmly, and was rather surprised that Phil, who usually overflows with gratitude for the slightest kindness, was not more effusive over my relative's interest in our affairs, and her broad-minded verdict.

"She's a lamb, after all, isn't she?" I asked, when the large lady had gone, and I was ready to creep into a bed only an inch too short for me.

"She may be a lamb, but she isn't going to let us shear her, if she can help it," said Phil, looking deadly wise.

"What *do* you mean?"

"My dear girl, with all your cleverness, you're only a baby child about some things. *Don't* you see what's she's driving at?"

I shook my head, with my hair about my face.

"Or what all her questions were leading up to? Well, then, what *do* you think has made her change her mind about our motor-boating?"

"She saw we could take care of ourselves."

"She has found out that we're poor, and obliged to. She supposed from what your cousin Robert told her, that we were heiresses; and she would have kept us on a long visit if — oh, you silly old dear, don't you see she's afraid of us — with *him*? She'll be polite and nice, but she wants us to disappear."

"Good gracious!"

"Pretty Lilli told me this evening that Freule Menela van der Windt hasn't much money, but she comes of a splendid family: she's a distant relation of that Mr. Brederode, and her people are diplomats who live at The Hague, though she's an orphan and visits about. If one of us were rich — why — oh, it's too horrid to go on. Now, maybe, you understand what I mean, and can put two and two together and agree with me."

"For a saint, you sometimes develop a hideous amount of worldly wisdom, my Phil," I replied. "But when I come to think Cousin Cornelia over, I'm afraid you're right. It would be fun to *flirt* with Robert, and frighten her, wouldn't it?"

"We are going away — to the motor-boat — to-morrow, and we shall never see him again," said Phil. "Besides, it's wrong to flirt, even with foreigners; and now do let me say my prayers."

VII

NEXT morning, when I waked up, and cautiously drew my watch from under the pillow, not to disturb Phyllis, it was only six o'clock, and there was Phil gazing at me, with eyes large and bright in the green dusk that filtered through the olive curtains.

"I've been awake for ages," said she.

"What are you thinking about?"

"The motor-boat. Queer — but I can't help it."

"Neither can I. Can you go to sleep again?"

"No. Can you?"

"Not I. Let's get up, and creep out of doors. What fun to go down to the beach and take a bath!"

"Nell! In our nighties?"

"Silly! We'll hire things — and bathing-machines."

After mature deliberation Phil decided not to risk being taken for a thief by the van Buren family; but I could not abandon the idea, and fifteen minutes later I was softly unlocking the front door, to steal alone into the pearly, new-born day. Oh, the wonder of it — the wonder of each new day, if one only stopped to think; but the wonder of this above all others!

Already there were a few people about, hurrying beachward; and when I reached the level of the firm, yellow sand, there were the red-trousered men of the bathing-machines, in full activity, getting their horses into the traces, while dogs raced wildly over sand-hillocks, and children played with bright, sea-washed shells the waves had flung them.

Two or three of the bath-machines were in use, some were

engaged for persons not yet arrived, and I thought myself lucky in securing one drawn by the handsomest horse of all. The others were dull, *blasé*-looking creatures compared to him; indeed, he was far too fine for a mere bathing-machine, and had a lovely cushiony back like the animals on which beautiful ladies pirouet in circuses. I longed to try it myself, when my shoes and stockings were off.

Just as I had got into the prickly blue serge costume provided by the "management," I heard the sound of stirring military music, played not far away by a brass band, and something queer happened at the same moment. The machine began to rock as if there were an earthquake, to dart forward, to retreat, and at last to go galloping ahead at a speed to suggest that in a sudden fit of hallucination it had persuaded itself it was a motor-car.

"That horse!" I gasped, and swaying first against one wall, then against the other, scarcely able to keep my feet, I tore the door open and peeped out.

If I had not been frightened I should have laughed, for it was plain to see from the expression of that cushiony back, that the animal was merely pretending to be afraid of the music, in a kittenish wish for a little early morning fun. But he was also pretending in quite a life-like manner to run away, and the thought occurred to me that the consequences might be as awkward for the occupant of the machine as if the jest were earnest.

"Whoa, whoa," cried a voice in pursuit, and splash! went the beast into the surf. He was playing that he was a sea-horse, now, and enjoying it selfishly, without a thought of poor me in the horrid, tottery little box that would be knocked over by a big wave, maybe, in another instant, in a welter of sand and salt water, under a merry horse's hoofs.

I clung to the door with one hand, and the frame with the other, swinging back and forth on the threshold, with

abnormally large iron shoes flying up and down in the wet green foreground, and the whole North Sea towering over me in the middle distance — oh, but a very near middle distance!

I wavered in mind as well as body. If I didn't jump out — now, this minute — I might be caught and pinned like a mouse in a trap, under the water. If I did jump, the horse would kick me, and the wheels of the machine would go over me, and I should be battered as well as drowned before anybody could fish me out. I did feel horribly alone in the world, and the waves looked as tall as transparent green skyscrapers.

"One, two; at *three* I'll jump," I was saying resolutely, between chattering teeth, when a head came toward me in the sea. It came on top of a wave, and like the dear little cut-off cherubs in old-fashioned prayer-books, it seemed to have no body, yet I recognized it, and felt half inclined to bow (salutation, O Caesar, from one about to die!) only it would have seemed ridiculous to bow to a mere passing head, when one was on the eve of being swept away by the North Sea. Phyllis might have done it. I gave a short shriek, and then it appeared that the head had full control of the wave, for it stopped and let the wave rush by, to show that it had a tall, brown, dripping body, sketchily clad in the kind of thing that men dare to call a bathing-suit.

It did not seem strange at the time that William the Silent should be shot from a wave as if by a catapult, and still less strange that without a word he should seize my horse by the head and stop him. It seemed the sort of thing that ought to happen to foreigners traveling in Holland, if in need of succor.

"Oh, thank you so much!" I heard myself saying, just as if he had had on a frock-coat and top-hat, and had stopped a hansom cab for me in Bond Street.

"Not at all," I heard him reply, in the same London-in-

the-season tone Then suddenly I thought of Stanley in the desert saying, "Dr. Livingstone, I believe ?" and my bare feet, and his dripping hair, and the whole scene struck me so quaintly that I laughed out aloud; whereupon he smiled a wet, brown smile, showing white teeth.

"I'm *not* having hysterics," I spluttered, with my mouth full of spray. "It's only — only —" and the spray choked me with its salt.

"Of course," said William the Silent, grave again, and so like the portrait that I felt I must be a historical character, acting with him in an incident forgotten or expurgated by Motley. "I'm so glad I came. I saw you from further out, and thought something was wrong. But it's all right now."

"Yes, thank you," I said meekly. "Why, you're an *Englishman*, aren't you ?"

"Dutch to the backbone," he answered; and then, suddenly conscious, perhaps, that the (might one call it "feature" ?) he had mentioned, was too much exposed to be discussed thus lightly, he changed the subject.

"Here's your man," he said quickly, and forthwith fell to scolding in vehement Dutch the unfortunate wretch who had waded to the rescue. The horse, made sadder if not wiser by blows from his master, allowed himself to be backed for a certain distance, until it was safe for me to descend and take my postponed bath. I had but time to bow and murmur more inane thanks, to receive another bow and polite murmur in return (both murmurs being drowned by the sea) when the retrograde movement of the bathing-machine parted me and my living life-preserver. He stood in the water looking after us long enough to see that there would be no further incidents, then took a header into the waves again.

I'm not sure that my adventure did not add spice to the salt of my bath. Anyhow, it was glorious, and I ran back to the villa at last tingling with joy of life, in time to be let in by

a maid who was cleaning the door-steps. It was half-past seven, and breakfast was at eight. I had to make haste with my toilet, but luckily there are few tasks which can't be accompanied by a running fire of chat (that is, if one is a woman) so I had told everything to Phyllis by the time I had begun fastening the white serge frock in which I was to go to The Hague and the *Concours Hippique*. Just then the Japanese gong sent forth its melancholy wail, so we hurried down, and I forgot to tell Phyllis not to mention the incident. I didn't think it the kind of incident which would be approved by the van Buren family, and on second thoughts I didn't approve of it myself.

Hardly were we comfortably seated at the table, however, when Phil told Robert what a part his friend had played in my adventure. I could not stop her, and when I was called upon for details, gave them rather than seem to be secretive.

"We must be thankful that Brederode was taking his dip early," said Robert. "I will tell him this afternoon that we are very grateful for what he did."

I blushed consciously. "Oh, *must* you?" I asked. "Somehow, I've an idea he'll think it stupid of me to have mentioned it. Besides, maybe it *wasn't* your friend. Perhaps it was some one who looked like him. The — er — dress was so different, and I had hardly seen Mr. Brederode ——"

"Jonkheer Brederode," corrected Freule Menela, softly.

I broke out laughing. "Jonkheer! Oh, do forgive me, but it sounds so funny. I really *never* could call a person Jonkheer, and take him *seriously*."

"You will have to call him Jonkheer when I bring him to the box, after he has finished his part in the *Concours Hippique*," said Robert. "There is no one who looks like Rudolph Brederode, so it must have been he. You can see this afternoon."

"But I don't *want* to see," I objected, crossly, for I felt I

could not solemnly and adequately thank the young man before my listening relatives, for popping out of the sea in his microscopic costume, and coming to the rescue of me in mine. I had squeaked and curled up my toes, and been altogether ridiculous; and I knew we should at best burst out laughing in each other's faces — which would astonish the van Buren family.

"Whoever he was, I thanked him three times this morning, and that's enough," I went on. "He wasn't risking his life, you know, and really and truly, I'd rather not meet him formally, if you don't mind."

"Very well," said Cousin Robert, looking offended, and turning his attention to breakfast.

It was, when I came to notice it, the oddest breakfast imaginable, yet it had a tempting air. There was a tiny glass vase of flowers at each person's place, and the middle of the table was occupied by a china hen sitting on her nest. The eggs which she protected were hard-boiled; and ranged round the nest were platters of every kind of cold smoked meat, and cold smoked fish, dreamed of in the philosophy of cooks. There was also cold ham; and there were crisp, rich little rusks, and gingerbread in Japanese tin boxes, to eat with honey in an open glass dish, and there was coffee fit for gods and goddesses. Even Phil drank it, though she was offered tea, excusing her treachery by saying that she found her tastes were changing to suit the climate of Holland — a dangerous theory, since who can tell to what wild lengths it may lead?

When we had finished, the coffee-tray was taken from its place in front of Cousin Cornelia, and another tray, bearing two large china bowls of hot water, a dish with soap, a toy mop with a carved wood handle, and two towels, was substituted for it.

"I wash the fine china and the coffee-spoons myself, after breakfast," explained Cousin Cornelia, slipping off her rings,

and beginning her pretty task. "The best of servants are not as careful as their mistresses, and it is a custom in Holland."

"But you didn't wash the coffee- and tea-cups last night after dinner," I reminded her.

"No," she replied, "I never do that."

"But isn't the china as valuable, and isn't there as much danger of it's being broken?"

She looked puzzled, almost distressed. "Yes, that is true," she admitted, "but — it is not a custom. I don't know why, but it never has been."

Her housewifely pleasure was spoiled for the moment, and I wished that I hadn't spoken.

After all, Lisbeth and Lilli were not to go with us to The Hague. This was the morning for opening the curio cabinets in the drawing-room, and washing the contents, and the girls were expected to help their mother. As the glass doors are never opened, unless that some guest may carefully handle a gold snuff-box, a miniature, or a bit of old Delft, the things could scarcely need washing; but the rule is to have them out once a month, and it would be a crime to break it. This Freule Menela explained in a low voice, and with the suspicion of a smile, as if she wished the two girls from London to understand that she was able to see the humorous side of these things.

"Your cousins are old-fashioned," she went on, "though dear people; I've known them since I was a child, and am fond of them for their own sakes as well as Robert's. You must not think that everybody in our country dines at five. For instance, if you visited in my set at The Hague, you would find things more as they are in France. When Robert and I are married *I* shall manage the house."

We listened civilly, but liked her none the better for her disavowal of van Buren ways.

"Horrid, snobbish, disloyal little wretch," said Phil, after-

wards, quite viciously. "Your cousin's a hundred times too good and too good-looking for her; but she doesn't know that. She fancies herself superior, and thinks she's condescending to ally herself with the family. I do believe she's marrying your cousin for his money, and if she could get a chance to do better according to her ideas, she'd throw him over."

"It isn't likely she'll ever have another chance of any sort," said I; "Robert won't get rid of his bargain easily."

"She's going with us this morning, and makes a favor of it," went on Phil. "She says she's tired to death of the pictures; but I'm sure ten wild horses wouldn't keep her at home."

Be that as it may, the power of twenty wild horses in motor form rushed her away in our society and that of her fiancé.

In the beautiful forest, which I was happy in seeing again, we threaded intricate, dark avenues, and came at last (as if we had been a whole party of tourist princes in the tale of the "Sleeping Beauty") to the House in the Wood.

The romance of the place grew in my eyes, because a princess built it to please her husband, and because the husband was that son of William the Silent who best carried on his father's plans for Holland's greatness. I'm afraid I cared more about it for the sake of Princess Amalia and Frederic Henry of Orange, than for the sake of the Peace Conference, because the Conference was modern; and it was of the princess I thought as we passed through room after room of the charming old house, hidden in the very heart of the forest. Had she commanded the exquisite Chinese embroideries, the wonderful decorations from China and Japan, and the lovely old china? I wouldn't ask, for if she had had nothing to do with that part, I didn't wish to know.

In the octagonal Orange Salon where the twenty-six Powers met to make peace, and where the walls and cupola are a riot of paintings in praise of Frederic Henry and his relations, we strained our necks to see the pictures, and our brains to recall

who the people were and what they had done; but even the portrait of Motley, which we'd just passed, and the knowledge that he wrote in this very house did not always prod our memories.

Robert would not let us stay long at the House in the Wood. He took us to see the site of the Palace of Peace, which Mr. Carnegie's money and a little of other people's will build, and then flashed us on to The Hague in time to reach the Mauritshuis as it opened.

Robert didn't pretend to know much about the pictures, though he was patriotically proud of them, as among the best to be found, if you searched the world. But the fiancée was in her element. "Tired to death" of these splendid things she might be, in her small soul, but she was determined to impress us with her artistic knowledge.

"I know exactly where all the best pictures are," she said, motioning away the official guides, "and I will take you to them."

She had a practical, energetic air, and her black eyes were sharp behind her *pince-nez*. I felt I could not be introduced by her to the glorious company of great men, and basely I slipped away from the party, leaving Phil to follow with outward humility and inward rebellion — a martyr to politeness.

Oh, how glad I was to be left alone with the pictures, with nobody to tell me anything about them! I flew back to buy a catalogue, and then, carefully dodging my friends, whose backs I spied from time to time, I gave myself up to happiness.

I didn't want to see the Madonnas and nymphs and goddesses, and Italian scenes, which a certain school conscientiously produced, because in their day it was the fashion. I wanted only the characteristically Dutch artists, the men who loved their dear Hollow Land, putting her beyond all, glorifying her, and painting what they knew with their hearts as well as eyes — the daily life of home; the rich brown dusk of

humble rooms; the sea, the sky, the gentle, flat landscape, the pleasant domestic animals.

My acquaintance with Dutch art was made in London at the National Gallery; now I wanted to see it at home, and understand it as one can best understand it here.

I soon found the great Rembrandt —"the School of Anatomy," and stood for a long time looking at the wonderful faces — faces in whose eyes each thought lay clear to read. What a picture! A man who had done nothing else all his life long but paint just that, would have earned the right to be immortal; but to have been only twenty-six when he did it, and then to have gone on, through year after year, giving the world masterpieces, and to be repaid by that world in the end with poverty and hardship! My cheeks burned as I stood thinking of it, and somehow I felt guilty and responsible, as if I'd lived in Rembrandt's day, and been as ungrateful as the others.

I had expected to be disappointed in Paul Potter's "Bull," because people always speak of it at once, if they hear you are going to Holland; but if you could be disappointed in that young and winning beast who kindly stands there with diamonds in his great velvet eyes, and the breath coming and going under his rough, wholesome coat for you to look at and admire, when all the time you know that he could kill you if he liked, why, you would deserve to be gored by him and trodden by his companions.

How I wanted to have known Jan van Steen, and thanked him for his glorious, rollicking, extraordinary pictures (especially for "The Poultry Yard"), and have slyly stolen his bottle away from him sometimes, so that he might have painted even more, and not have come to ruin in the end! How I loved the gentle Van Ruysdaels, and how pathetic the everlasting white horse got to seem, after I had seen him repeated again and again in every sort of tender or eccentric landscape! Poor,

tired white horse! I thought he must have been as weary of his journeyings as the Wandering Jew.

There are two Rubens in the Mauritshuis which intoxicated me, as if I'd been drinking new red wine; and there is one little Gerard Douw, above all other Gerard Douws, worth a three-days' journey on foot to see. In a window of the Bull's room I found it; and I stood so long staring, that at last I began to be afraid the others might have gone away. They came upon me, though, all too soon, and exclaimed, "Why, where *have* you been?" and "We've been looking for you *everywhere*." I said I was sorry, and wondered how I had been so stupid as to miss them. Then we were marshalled away by Robert for luncheon, as we'd been three hours in the Mauritshuis, and before long we must be driving to the *Concours Hippique*.

Only three hours in some of the best society on earth, and I shall be expected to tell about my impressions when I go back to England! I know well that I can tell nothing worth telling; and yet, even in this short time, I feel that I understand more about Holland and the Hollanders than I could have come to understand, except through their pictures — more even than Motley could have told me.

I said to myself as I went away from the galleries, that Dutch painting would stand for me henceforth as an epitome of the Dutch people. No one but the Dutch could have painted pictures like theirs — so quaint, so painstaking, and at the same time so splendid. Their love of rich brown shadow and amber light was learned in the dim little rooms of their own homes, and of inns where the brass and pewter gleamed in the mellow dusk of raftered kitchens, and piles of fruit and vegetables fell like jewels, from paniers such as Gerard Douw took three days to paint on a scale of three inches.

We had a hasty luncheon at a nice hotel with an air of Parisian gaiety about it, and sped away in the motor to the

Horse Show, which was to be held in a park between The Hague and Scheveningen. It was advertised on every wall and hoarding, even on lamp-posts, and Freule Menela (gorgeous in a Paris frock and tilted hat) prophesied that, as the Queen and Prince Consort were honoring the occasion, we should see the loveliest women, handsomest men, and prettiest dresses, as well as the best horses that Holland could produce.

"When I say Holland, I mean The Hague; it is the same thing," she added, with a conceited toss of the chin; and I thought she deserved shaking for her sly dig at Robert of Rotterdam, than whom there can be no handsomer young man in the Netherlands.

Cousin Cornelia in filmy gray, and the twins radiant as fresh-plucked roses in their white frocks and Leghorn hats, had arrived, and were in one of the many long, open loggias close to the red-and-gold pavilion which was ready for the Royalties.

Over the pavilion, with its gilded crown and crest, floated the orange flag as well as the tricolor of Holland; everywhere flags were waving and red bunting glowing, and there was far more effect of color than at an English race-meeting. Every box, every seat, was full; pretty hats nodded like flowers in a huge parterre swept by a breeze; smart-looking men with women in trailing white walked about the lawns; and Robert and Menela pointed out the celebrities — ambassadors and ambassadors' wives, politicians, popular actresses, celebrated journalists, men of title or wealth who owned horses and gave their lives to sport.

All the men of the *haut mond* were in frock-coats and tall hats, and most of them looked English. There were few of the type which I preconceived as Dutch, yet I saw faces in the crowd which Rembrandt or Rubens might have used as models; thin, dark faces; hard, shrewd faces, with long noses

and pointed chins; good-natured round faces, with wide-open gray eyes; important, conceited faces like the burgomasters in ancient portraits.

"Not a type has changed," I said to myself. "These people of to-day are the same people who suffered torture smiling, who were silent on the rack, who drove the Spaniards out of their land, and swept the English from the seas."

This was my mood when a stir among the throng heralded the coming of the Queen, and I applauded as patriotically as a Dutchwoman the young daughter of the brave house of Orange and Nassau.

She had a fine procession, and made an effective entrance through the wide gates that swung apart to let in her outriders in their green livery, and the royal coaches, with powdered coachmen and footmen in blazing red and gold. A charming young woman she looked, too, in her blowing white cloud of chiffon and lace, and ostrich-plumes. While she circled round the drive with her suite, I heard the Dutch National Hymn for the first time, and also a soft and plaintive air which is the Queen's own — a kind of "entrance music" which follows her about through life, like the music for a leading actress on the stage.

When the Queen in her white dress, the stout, bland Prince Consort in his blue uniform, and the ladies of the Court were settled under the crimson curtains of the pavilion, officers who were competing in the Horse Show — Hollanders in green and cerise, and plain blue; Belgians in blue and red; two or three Danes in delicious azure — were brought up with much ceremony to be introduced.

"There goes Rudolph Brederode," said Robert, a light of friendly admiration kindling in his eyes for a tall, slim figure in black coat and riding-breeches. "See, her Majesty is wishing him good luck. He —" But my cousin glanced at me, and remembering my base ingratitude, decided that I deserved

no further information about his hero, who ought to be my hero too.

I pretended not to hear, and watched the show of beautiful horses and carriages. They went round and round the great grassy ring, each driver (and some of them were English) taking off their top-hats in front of the Royal Pavilion.

There was a good deal of this kind of entertainment, but the best part of the show was saved for the last, when all the glittering carriages had disappeared from the course. Then came the jumping competition, in which the finest riders, officers and civilians, were to prove what they and their horses could do.

The crowd had wearied of the long driving contests, but as the Dutch soldiers ran out across the grass to take their places beside the hedges, hurdles, water-jumps, and obstacles, there was a general brisking up.

Then began the real excitement of the afternoon. People greeted their favorites with applause, and Cousin Robert's hero had the largest share. He made a splendid figure on his delicately shaped roan, a creature all *verve* and muscle like his master, graceful as a cat, and shining in the sun with the rich effulgence of a chestnut fresh from the burr.

I couldn't help a jumping of the pulses when the bell rang, and the good-looking young men on their grand horses cantered into the ring. Rudolph Brederode was the last, and his horse came in on its hind legs, pawing and prancing with sheer joy of life and its own beauty; yet what a different beast from that other who had also pirouetted to the sound of music in the morning! I wondered if William the Silent thought — but of course he didn't.

One by one the horses started, urged on or held back by their riders. All rode well, but not one got round the course without a fault — a jump short at a ditch; a hind hoof that brushed a hedge; the ring of an iron shoe on a hurdle; or a

wooden brick sent flying from the top row on a high wall; not one, until Rudolph Brederode's turn came.

At the last moment, a pat of his hand on his horse's satin shoulder quieted the splendid creature's nerves. Instantly it was calm, and coming down from fun to business, started off at the daintest of canters, which broke at exactly the right second into a noble bound. Without a visible effort the adorable beast rose for each obstacle, floating across hedges and walls as if it had been borne by the wings of Pegasus. The last, widest water-jump was taken with one long, flying leap; and then, doffing his hat low to the Royal Box, the conqueror rode away in a storm of applause.

"It's always like that. Brederode never fails in anything he undertakes," said Robert, as happy as if he, and not his friend, had been the victor. "I'm off to congratulate him now."

Two minutes later I saw the hero among the crowd, his head towering above most other heads; then I lost sight of him, and turned again to watch the course, for the riding was not nearly finished yet. But with the triumph of the great Water Beggar's descendant, the best was over. No one else did as well as he, or had as fine a horse, and I found myself looking for him and Robert. Maybe Robert would bring him to the box in spite of all. It was a pity the others should be cheated of a word with him — which even the twins seemed to hope for — just because Robert had to punish me.

But he did not come, nor did Robert until after the Royalties had gone, and Cousin Cornelia was ready to go too.

RUDOLPH BREDERODE'S POINT OF VIEW

VIII

I DON'T often do things that I have set my mind against doing, but when Destiny lays a hand on one's steering-gear, unexpected things happen.

My idea has always been that, when my time came to fall seriously in love, the girl would be a Dutch girl. I like and respect Dutch girls. When you want them, there they are. There's no nonsense in them — at least, as little as possible, considering that they are females. They don't fuss about their temperaments, and imagine themselves Mysteries, and Chameleons, and Anomalies, and make themselves and their lovers miserable by trying to be inscrutable. You can generally tell pretty well what they are going to do next, and if you don't want them to, you can prevent them from doing it. Also they have good nerves and good complexions, and for these reasons, and many others, make perfect wives for men with family traditions to keep up. That is why I always intended to fall seriously in love with a Dutch girl, although my mother was an Englishwoman, and her father (an English earl who thought England the only land) made an American heiress his Countess.

More than once I've come near to carrying out my intention, but the feeling I had, never seemed the right feeling, so I let the matter drop, and waited for next time.

A few days ago, I found out that there would never be a next time. I knew this when Rob van Buren spoke of the two girls who were with him at the Prinzenhof on July tenth as his "American cousin and an English friend."

I can never fall in love with a Dutch girl now, for I have done the thing I did not mean to do, and it can't be undone in this world. Once and for all, that is settled, however it may go with me where the girl is concerned. But it will go hard if I do not have her in the end, and I shall if she is to be got; for the men of my blood soon make up their minds when they want a thing, and they do not rest much until it's theirs. This peculiarity has often landed them in trouble in past times, and may land me in trouble now; but I'm ready for the risk, as they were.

I didn't know at first which was the English girl — *my* girl with the chestnut hair, dark hazel eyes, and rose and white complexion; or the other girl with brown hair, eyes of violet, and skin of cream. But when I encountered my girl in the sea at half-past six in the morning, unchaperoned except by a foolish runaway horse attached to a bathing-machine, I should have guessed that she was the American, even if there had been nothing in her pretty voice to suggest it.

I am sorry that it couldn't have been the other way round, for my English mother's sake, since my fate isn't to be Dutch. But it can't be helped. I have seen The One Girl, and it would be the same if she were a Red Indian.

I was going to lead up to the subject when van Buren came to speak to me at the Horse Show; but he began it, by thanking me, in the grave way he has, for coming to his cousin's rescue in the morning. I shouldn't have referred to that little business, as she might not have mentioned her adventure; but as she had told the story, it gave me a foundation to work on.

I said truly that what I had done was nothing, but hinted that I should be pleased to meet the young lady again; and thereupon expected an invitation to visit his mother's box. To my surprise, it didn't come, and Robert's face showed that there was a reason why.

"My cousin doesn't deserve that you should take an interest in her," he blurted out. "She is pretty, yes, and perhaps that is why she is so spoiled, for she is vain and capricious and flippant. I wish it were Miss Rivers who had our blood in her veins."

Queerly enough, instead of cooling me off toward the girl, Robert's criticism of her had the opposite effect. I have liked Robert since I took him under my wing during my last and his first year at Leiden. Perhaps it tickles my vanity to know that he has been boyish enough to make me into a kind of hero, little though I deserve it, and whenever I have been able to do him a good turn I have done it; but suddenly I found myself thinking him a young brute, and feeling that he deserved kicking.

"I suppose Miss Van Buren hasn't paid enough attention to your High Mightiness," said I.

"She hasn't put herself out much," said he; "but it isn't that I care about, it's her attitude toward you. Of course you couldn't help hearing what she said yesterday at the Prinzenhof about the portrait of William the Silent. Because I asked her afterwards if she didn't think it looked like you, she said not a bit; anyhow she had only been joking, and it was an ugly portrait. Then, this morning at breakfast, when I heard what happened on the beach, I told her that perhaps she would have the chance this afternoon to thank you. Instead of being pleased, she answered that she'd thanked you enough already, that you had run no risk, as what you did was nothing much, after all, and she hoped I wouldn't bring you. I tell you, Brederode, I could have boxed her ears."

I must confess that mine tingled, and for a moment I felt hurt and angry with the girl, but it was only for a moment. Then I laughed.

"Served you right for forcing me upon her," said I. "Well, it's evident she's taken a dislike to me. It must be my business

to change that, for I have exactly the opposite feelings toward her. Some day I shall *make* her like me."

"I wonder you can think it worth while to trouble your head over my cousin, after what I've felt it right to tell you," said Robert. "I thought you ought to know, otherwise you would have considered it strange I didn't ask you to our box, as I should have been proud to do; but I was angry for your sake, and said I wouldn't bring you near her. Now, as things are, I don't see how you can meet my cousin. The van Buren blood is at its worst in her, and it has made her obstinate as a pig."

"Heavens, what a simile!" said I; yet I couldn't help laughing. "I, too, am obstinate as a pig; and being proud of my Dutch blood, I like her the better for hers, all the more because it's obstinate blood, and it wouldn't be true Dutch if it were not. I tell you, Robert, I'm going to know your cousin — not through you; I don't want that now, but in some other way, which will arrange itself sooner or later — probably sooner."

"I don't see how," Robert repeated. "I was in hopes that she and Miss Rivers, her stepsister, could have been persuaded by my mother to pay us a long visit, and give up an objectionable plan they have. But Cousin Helen—Nell, as Miss Rivers calls her — has been pig-headed even with my mother. I am sure it is not Miss Rivers's fault. She is not that kind of girl."

"Do you mind telling me the objectionable plan?" I asked.

"I shall be glad to tell," said he, "and see if you don't agree with me that it is monstrous, though, strange to say, now mother has talked with the girls, *she* does not seem to think it as bad as she was inclined to at first. She tells me that they are determined to persist, and she thinks they will come to no harm. My cousin has been left a motor-boat by a friend's will. You must have seen it: Captain Noble's 'Lorelei,' which used to lie near the Rowing Club. She and Miss Rivers have come

to take a trip through the waterways of Holland, though my mother has learned that their financial circumstances hardly warrant such an undertaking."

"Plucky girls!" was my comment.

"Ah, but you don't know all. A young man is going with them, a strange American young man, whom they never saw till yesterday."

"By Jove! In what capacity — as chauffeur?"

"Not at all. As a sort of paying guest, so far as I can understand the arrangement."

"It sounds rather an odd one."

"I should say so; but I mustn't make you think it's worse than it is. There was a misunderstanding about the boat. The American thought he'd hired it from the caretaker, and they were sorry for his disappointment. He has an aunt, a Scotswoman of title, who is to be of the party."

"That makes all the difference, doesn't it? — not the title, but the aunt."

"It makes a difference, certainly; but the man may be an adventurer. He's an artist, it appears, named Starr ——"

"What, the Starr whose Salon picture made so much talk in Paris this spring?"

"Yes; but being a good artist doesn't constitute him a good man. He might make love to the girls."

"Beast! So he might, aunt or no aunt. She'll probably aid and abet him. I don't know that I blame you for objecting to such an adventure for your cousin."

"Oh, it isn't so much for her — that is, except on principle. But I've done all I can, and my mother has done all she can, so you can imagine what my cousin's pig-headedness is like to resist us both. My mother tells me she could do *nothing* with her; and the girls are leaving us to-morrow. They go back to Rotterdam, where they expect to find Starr's aunt, and, they hope, a skipper for the motor-boat. Cousin Helen asked if I

could recommend a suitable man; but even if I knew one, I should not make it easier for her to flout the wishes of the family."

"Naturally not," said I, with the sort of fellow-feeling for Robert which makes one wondrous kind. And I was sure that if I were Miss Van Buren's cousin, and had set myself against her doing a certain thing, she would not have done it.

"However, they are returning to Rotterdam early in the morning, and that being the case, as I was saying, I don't see how it will be possible for you to meet my cousin."

"I bet that I will meet her, and be properly introduced, too, before either of us is a week older," said I, and then was sorry I had clothed my resolve in such crude words. But it was too late to explain or apologize, for at that instant two or three men came up. The thought of what I had blurted out lay heavy on my mind afterwards, and if it had not seemed a far-fetched and even school-missish thing to do, I would have sent a line to Robert asking him to erase that clumsy and impertinent boast from his memory. If he is stupid enough or awkward enough to repeat anything of our conversation, and give Miss Van Buren the impression that I tried to make a wager concerning her, it will be all up with me, I know.

As it is, I can only hope that my words will go out at one ear as fast as they went in at the other.

Next morning I had made no definite plan of action, but thought that as Miss Van Buren was going to Rotterdam, it could do no harm for me to go to Rotterdam too, and see what would happen next. Things of some sort were bound to happen, and one way or other my chance might come before she started on her journey.

My mother is at Château Liliendaal, the place where she likes best to spend July and August when we don't run over to England; but she didn't expect me to join her for some days, and meanwhile I was free to do as I chose.

I was in hopes that I might see Miss Van Buren in the train, if I took the most popular one in the morning; but she and her stepsister were not on board, so I fancied Robert must be driving them back in the borrowed car, despite his objections to their proceedings.

I went straight to the Rowing Club, where I have several friends, and as I knew from Robert that the motor-boat was 'Lorelei' I easily found out where she was lying. The next thing was to go and have a look at her, to see if preparations were being made for an immediate start.

I had forgotten what she was like, but I found her a handsome little craft, with two cabins, and deck-room to accommodate four or five passengers; also I learned from a man employed on the quay close by that the motor was an American one of thirty horse-power. He told me as well, by way of gossip, that a rakish barge, moored with her pert brass nose almost on "Lorelei's" stern, had been hired, and would be towed by the owners of the motor-boat.

I didn't know what to make of this bit of information, as Robert had not mentioned a barge; but the skylight meant a studio, so I saw the man Starr's hand in the arrangement, and began to hate the fellow.

By the time I had loitered in the neighborhood for half an hour or more, it was noon, and it occurred to me that I might go and lunch at Miss Van Buren's hotel. But this would look like dogging the girl's footsteps, and eventually I decided upon a more subtle means of gaining my end.

Nevertheless, I strolled past the house; but, seeing nobody worth seeing, I reluctantly turned my steps farther on to a garden restaurant — a middle-class place, with tables under chestnuts and beeches or in shady arbors for parties of two or four.

It was early still, but the restaurant is popular, and all the small tables under the trees were appropriated. Fortunately,

several arbors were empty, although one or two were engaged, and I walked into the first I came to.

For a few moments I was kept waiting, then a fluent waiter appeared to recommend the most desirable dishes of the day. His eloquence was in full tide, when a man paused before the entrance of my arbor, hesitated, and went on to the next.

"That is engaged, sir," called out the waiter.

"I don't understand Dutch," answered the new-comer in American-English. "Can you speak French?"

The waiter could, and did. The man — a good-looking fellow, with singularly brilliant black eyes and a fetching smile — explained that it was he who had engaged the arbor, that he was expecting a lady, and would not order luncheon until she joined him.

He sat down with his gray flannel back to me, but I could see him through the screen of leaves and lattice, and it was clear that he was nervous. He kept jumping up, going to the doorway, staring out, and returning to throw himself on the hard green bench with an impatient sigh. Evidently She was late.

An omelet arrived for me, and still my neighbor was alone; but I had scarcely taken up my fork when a light, tripping step sounded crisply on the crushed sea-shells of the path outside. A shadow darkened the doorway, and for an instant a pocket-edition of a woman, in a neat but well-worn tailor-made dress, hung on my threshold. Rather like a trim gray sparrow she was, expecting a crumb, then changing her mind and hopping further on to find it.

But the change of mind came only with the springing up of the young man in the adjoining arbor.

"*Aunt Fay*, is that you?" he inquired, in an anxious voice, speaking the name with marked emphasis.

"Oh!" chirped the gray sparrow, flitting to the next door-

way, "I must have counted wrong. I saw a young man alone, and — Then you are my nephew — *Ronald.*"

She also threw stress upon the name and the relationship, and, though I knew nothing of the face that lurked behind a tissue veil, I became aware that the lady was an American.

"Funny thing," I said to myself. "They don't seem to have met before. She must be a long-lost aunt."

My neighbor would have ushered his relative into the arbor, but she lingered outside.

"Come, Tibe," she cried, with a shrill change of tone. "Here, Tibe, Tibe, Tibe!"

There was a sudden stir in the garden, a pulling of chairs closer to small tables, a jumping about of waiters, a few stifled shrieks in feminine voices, and a powerful tan-colored bulldog, with a peculiarly concentrated and earnest expression on his countenance, bounded through the crowd toward his mistress, with a fine disregard of obstacles. Evidently, if there was any dodging to be done, he had been brought up to expect others to do it; and I thought the chances were that he would seldom be disappointed.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Nephew Ronald, as the monster cannoned against him. "You didn't mention This."

"No; I knew you were sure to love him. I wouldn't have anything to do with a creature who didn't. Isn't he exquisite?"

"He's a dream," said the young man; but he did not specify what kind of dream.

"Where I go, there Tibe goes also," went on the lady. "His name is Tiberius, but it's rather long to say when he's doing something that you want him to stop. He'll lunch with us like a perfect gentleman. Oh, he is more *flower* than dog! Tibe, come away from that door *instantly!*"

The flower had paused to see whether he approved of my lunch, and from the way he turned back a protruding black drapery of underlip from a pair of upstanding ivory tusks, I

judged that neither it nor I found favor in his eyes. Perhaps he resented laughter in mine; yet there was something after all in the flower simile, if not precisely what the blossom's adoring mistress meant. Tibe's face distinctly resembled a pansy, but an appalling pansy, the sort of pansy you would not like to meet in the dark.

Whatever may have been his opinion of me, he had to be dragged by the collar from my door, and later I caught the glitter of his gaze through the lattice.

Aunt Fay slipped in between bench and table, sitting down opposite to me, and when the nephew took his old place I had glimpses of her over his shoulder.

She was unfastening her veil. Now it had fallen. Alas for any hopes which the trim, youthful figure might have raised! Her thick gray hair was plastered down over temples, cheeks, and ears, and a pair of uncommonly large blue spectacles left her eyes to the imagination.

"I began to be afraid there might have been some mistake in the telegram I sent, after I got your letter saying I mustn't come to your address," began Nephew Ronald, hastily, after a moment of silence that followed the dropping of the veil. "What I said was, 'Buiten Oord, third arbor on the left as you come in by main entrance, lunch quarter past twelve. Any cabman will know the place.' Was the message all right?"

"Yes," replied Aunt Fay; "but I suffer a little with my eyes. That's why I stopped when I came to the next arbor. I'm late, because darling Tibe ran away just as I was hailing a cab, so I had to let that one go, and rescue him from the crowd. Wherever he goes he has a throng round him. People admire him so much. Down, my angel! You mustn't put your feet on strange gentlemen's tables, when you're invited to lunch. He's hungry, poor lamb."

"I hope you are also," said Nephew, politely; but his voice

There was a sudden stir in the garden

was heavy. I wondered if he were disappointed in Aunt, or if it was only that the Pansy had got on his nerves. "Here's my waiter. We'll have something to eat, and talk things over as we lunch. There's a tremendous *menu* for a *table d'hôte* meal — thoroughly Dutch. No other people could get through it and live. Probably you would prefer —— "

"Let me see. Potage d'Artois; Caneton de Luxembourg; Soles aux fines herbes; Pommes Natures; Fricandeau de Veau; Haricots Princesse; Poulet roti; Compote; Homard frais; Sauce Ravigottes; Salad melé; Crême au chocolat; Fromage; Fruit. Humph, funnily arranged, isn't it? But Tibe and I have been living in furnished lodgings, and we — er — have eaten rather irregularly. I dare say between us we might manage the lunch as it is."

Nephew Ronald ordered it, and another silence fell. I think that he drummed on the table.

"We might as well get to business," suggested the lady. "Does the aunt engagement begin immediately?"

"I — er — there's one difficulty," faltered the young man. "Unfortunately I injudiciously let drop that my aunt was a *fine* woman."

"Really! You might better have waited till you made her acquaintance. You can't pick and choose in a hurry, when you must have a ready-made aunt, my dear sir. Myself, I *prefer* small women. They are more feminine."

"Please don't be angry. You see, it was like this. I said that, when I still hoped to have a real aunt on hand for my purpose. That was the way the scrape began. I inadvertently let out her name and a lot of things —— "

"To the young ladies I'm to chaperon?"

"Yes, to the young ladies. If they remember the description —— "

"You can say you referred to your aunt's character when you remarked that she was a fine woman."

"I suppose so" (still doubtfully). "But then there's another trouble, you know. I advertised in *Het Nieus van den Dag* for a *Scotch* aunt."

I moved suddenly, for a queer thought jumped into my head. The blue spectacles were focused on me, and there was a low murmur, to which the man responded in his usual tone. "No danger. *Dutch.* I heard him talking to the waiter."

Now, perhaps I should have called through the lattice and the leaves: "Combination of Dutch and English. Half and half. As much at home in one language as the other." But for several reasons I was silent. One was, that it was easier to be silent than to make a fuss. Another was that, if the suspicion which had just sprung into my head had any foundation, it was mine or any man's duty to know the truth and act upon it. So I sat still, and went on with my luncheon as my next door neighbors went on with theirs; and no one remembered my existence except Tibe.

"I've no moral objection to being a Scotch aunt," said the obliging lady.

"It's your accent, not your morals, that sticks in my throat."

"The latter, I trust were sufficiently vouched for in the letter from our American Consul here. You can call on him if you choose. Few ready-made aunts obtained by advertisement would have what I have to recommend me. As for a Scotch accent, I've bought Burns, and a Crockett in Tauchnitz, and by to-morrow I'll engage that no one — unless a Scotsman — would know me from a Scotswoman. Hoot, awa', mon. Come ben."

"But — er — my aunt's rather by way of being a swell. She wouldn't be found dead saying 'hoot, awa', 'or 'come ben.' There's just a little indescribable burr-r —— "

"Then I will have just a little indescribable burr-r. And you can buy me a Tartan blouse and a Tam."

"I'm afraid a Tam wouldn't — wouldn't quite suit your

style, or — or that of any well-regulated aunt; and a well-regulated aunt is absolutely essential to the situation, I —— "

"*Do* you mean to insinuate that I am not a well-regulated aunt?" There was a rustling in the arbor. "Come, Tibe," the lady added in a firm voice, "you and I will go away and leave this gentlemen to select from all the other charming and eligible aunts who have no doubt answered his quite conventional and much-to-be-desired advertisement."

"For heaven's sake, don't go!" cried the man, springing to his feet. "There, your dog's got the duck. But it doesn't matter. Nobody else worth speaking of — nobody in any way possible — has answered my advertisement. I can't lose you. But, you see, I somehow fancied from your letter that you were large and imposing, just what I wanted; and you said you'd lately been in Scotland —— "

"The accent was one of the few things I did *not* wish to bring away with me," sniffed the lady. "Under the table, Tibe; we're not going, after all, for the moment. And as you *have* the duck, you may as well eat it."

"Good dog," groaned the stricken young man. If he had not, to the best of my belief, been engaged in concocting a treacherous plot against one whom I intended to protect, I could have pitied him.

Both sat down again. There was a pause while plates were changed, and then the female plotter took up the running.

"I may be conceited," said she, "but my opinion is that you're very lucky to get me. I may not be Scotch, and I may not be a 'swell,' but I am — a lady."

"Oh — of course."

"What were the others like who answered your advertisement?"

"All Dutch, and spoke broken English, except one, who was German. She wore a reform dress, hunched up behind with unspeakable elastic things. You'd make allowances if

you knew what I've gone through since the day before yesterday, when I found, after telegraphing a frantic appeal to my aunt in Scotland, that she's left home and they could give me no address. I've had an awful time. My nerves are shattered."

"Then you'd better secure peace by securing me. An aunt in the hand is worth two in the bush."

"A good aunt needs no bush. I mean — oh, I don't know what I mean; but, of course, I ask nothing better than to secure you."

"No; you mean you think you'll *get* nothing better. Ha, ha! I agree with you. But Tibe and I didn't come here to be played with. You're giving us a very good lunch, but I have his future and mine to think of. I admit, I'm in want of an engagement as a traveling companion to ladies in Holland; but you aren't the only person to whom it occurs to put ads. in Dutch papers. If you'd searched the columns of *Het Nieus van den Dag* you might have seen mine. I have not been without answers, and I don't know that I should care to be an aunt, anyway. It makes one seem so *old*. What I came to say was that, unless you can offer me an immediate engagement —— "

"Oh, I can and do. I beg of you to be my aunt from this moment."

"Tibe to travel with me and have every comfort ?"

"Yes, yes, and luxury."

"A pint of warm milk every morning, half a pound of best beef or chicken with vegetables at noon, two new-laid eggs at —— "

"Certainly. He has but to choose — he seems to know his own mind pretty well."

"I don't think it a subject for joking. That duck was close to the edge of the table. We'd better talk *business*. Your letter said a hundred gulden a week to a suitable aunt, and a two months' engagement certain. Well, it's not enough. I should

want at least three hundred dollars extra, down in advance (I can't do it in gulden in my head) for *your* sake."

"For my sake?"

"Don't you see, to do you credit as a relative, I must have things, nice things, plenty of nice things? Tartan blouses, and if not Tams, cairngorms. Yes, a cairngorm brooch would be realistic. I saw a beauty yesterday — only two hundred gulden. No aunt of yours can go for a trip on the waterways of Holland unless she's well fitted out."

"I've been admiring the dress you are wearing. It's wonderfully trim."

"Thanks. But it happens to be about a hundred years old, and is the only one I have left. As for my hat, and boots — but Tibe and I have suffered some undeserved vicissitudes of late."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Of course you must have three hundred dollars to begin with."

"By the way, am I Mrs. or Miss?"

"You must know best as to —— "

"I mean me in the part of your aunt."

"Oh, you're neither Miss nor Mrs."

"*Really!*"

"I mean, you're married, but you have a title."

"That will come more expensive. A person of title should have a diamond guard for her wedding-ring. You *feel* that, don't you?"

"Now you speak of it, I do."

"Would you like her to wear a cap for indoors?"

"Sounds as if she were a parlormaid —— "

"Not at all. I'm sure a proper Scotch aunt would wear a cap."

"Mine's a proper Scotch aunt, and she doesn't." She's about forty, but she looks twenty-five. Nobody would believe she was anybody's aunt."

"But you want everybody to believe I'm yours?"

"Oh, have a cap by all means."

"It should be real lace."

"Buy it."

"And another to change with."

"Buy that too. Get a dozen if you like."

"Thanks, I will. I believe you just said the engagement dates from to-day?"

"Rather. I was going to tell you, I must have an aunt by this evening. She arrives from Scotland, you know."

"With her dog. *That's* easy."

"I hope the girls like dogs."

"They do if they're nice girls."

"They're enchanting girls, one English, one American. I adore both: that's why I'm a desperate man where an aunt's concerned. To produce an aunt is my one hope of enjoying their society on the motor-boat trip I wrote you about. I wouldn't do this thing if I weren't desperate, and even desperate as I am, I wouldn't do it if I couldn't have got an all-right kind of aunt, an aunt that — that —— "

"That an unimpeachable American Consul could vouch for. I assure you, Nephew, you ought to think of a woman like me as of — of a ram caught in the bushes."

"I'm willing to think of you in that way, if it's not offensive. The Consul didn't go into particulars —— "

"That was unnecessary."

"Perhaps. Everything's settled, then. I'll count you out five hundred dollars in gulden. Buy what you choose — so long as it's aunt-like. I'll meet your train at — we'll say seven, the Beurs Station."

"I understand. I'll be there with Tibe and our luggage. But you haven't told me your name yet. I *signed* my letter to you, Mary Milton. *You* cautiously —— "

"Ronald L. Starr is your nephew's name. Lady MacNairne is my aunt's."

I came very near choking myself with a cherry-stone. Long before this I'd been sure of his name, but I hadn't expected to hear Lady MacNairne's.

"Forty, and looks twenty-five."

Yes, that was a fair description of Lady MacNairne, as far as it went; but much more might be said by her admirers, of whom I openly declared myself one, before a good-sized audience at a country house in Scotland, not quite a year ago.

It was merely a little flirtation, to pass the time, on both our parts. A woman of forty who is a beauty and a flirt has no time to waste, and Lady MacNairne is not wasteful. She was the handsomest woman at Kinloch Towers, my cousin Dave Norman's place, and a Dutchman was a novelty to her; so we amused ourselves for ten days, and I should have kept the pleasantest memory of the episode if Sir Alec had not taken it into his head to be jealous.

Poor Fleda MacNairne was whisked away before the breaking-up of the house-party, and that is the last I have seen of her, but not the last I've heard. Once in a while I get a letter, amusing, erratic, like herself; and in such communications she doesn't scruple to chronicle other flirtations which have followed hard on mine. Only a short time before the making of this plot in a Rotterdam garden, a letter from her gave startling news: consequently I am now in possession of knowledge apparently denied to the nephew.

A few minutes more and the pair in the next arbor separated, the woman departing to purchase the fittings of aunthood, the man remaining to pay the bill. But before he had time to beckon the waiter I got up and walked into his lair.

"Mr. Starr," I said, "I'm going to stop your game."

"The devil you are! And who are you?" answered he, first staring, then flushing.

"My name's Rudolph Brederode," said I.

"You're a d — d eavesdropper," said he.

"You are the same kind of a fool, for thinking because your neighbor spoke Dutch he couldn't know English. I sat still and let you go on, because I don't mean to allow any of the persons concerned to be imposed upon by you."

He glared at me across the table as if he could have killed me, and I glared back at him; yet all the while I was conscious of a sneaking kindness for the fellow, he looked so stricken — rather like an endearing scamp of an Eton boy who has got into a horrid scrape, and is being hauled over the coals by the Head.

"What business is it of yours?" he wanted to know.

"Lady MacNairne's a friend of mine."

"Indeed! But what of that? She's my aunt."

"And Robert van Buren is another friend, an intimate one. He has told me about his cousin's motor-boat. He doesn't approve of the tour, as it is. When he hears from me —— "

"Oh, hang it all, why do you want to be such a spoilsport?" demanded the poor wretch in torture. "Did *you* never fall in love with a girl, and feel you'd do anything to get her?"

This sudden change, this throwing himself upon my mercy, took me somewhat aback. In threatening to tear the mote from his eye, what about a certain obstruction in mine?

He was quick to see his advantage and follow it up.

"You say you heard everything. Then you must see why I thought of this plan. I hoped at first Aunt Fleda might be prevailed on to come. When I lost that hope I just couldn't give up the trip. I had to get an aunt to chaperon those blessed girls, or it was good-by to them, for me. What harm am I doing? The woman's respectable; the Consul has written me a letter about her. If you know Aunt Fay — that's my name for her — you know she would call this the best kind of a lark. I'll confess to her some day. I'd have my head cut off sooner than injure Miss Rivers or Miss Van Buren. Afterwards, when we've got to be great friends, they shall hear

the whole story, I promise; but of course, you can ruin me if you tell them, or let your friend tell them, at this stage. *Do* you think it's fair to take advantage of what you overheard by accident, and spoil the chance of my life? Oh, *say* now, what can I do to make you keep still?"

"Well, I'm — *hanged!*" was all I could answer. And a good deal to my own surprise, I heard myself suddenly burst into sardonic laughter.

Then he laughed, too, and we roared together. If any one noticed us, they must have thought us friends of a lifetime; yet five minutes ago we had been like dogs ready to fly at each other's throats, and there was no earthly reason why we should not be of the same mind still.

"You *are* going to let me alone, aren't you?" he continued to plead, when he was calmer. "You are going to do unto me as you'd be done by, and give my true love a chance to run smooth? If you refuse, I could wish that fearful Flower back that I might set him at you."

My lips twitched. "I'm not sure," said I, "whether you ought to be in a gaol or in the school-room."

"I ought to be on a motor-boat tour with the two most charming girls in the world; and if I'm not to be there, I might as well be in my grave. Do ask people about me. Ask my aunt. I'm not a villain. I'm one of the nicest fellows you ever met, and I've no bad intentions. I've got too much money to be an adventurer. Why, look here! I'm supposed to be quite a good match. Either of the girls can have me and my millions. Both are at the feet of either. At present I've no choice. Don't drive me to drink. I should hate to die of Schnapps; and there's nothing else liquid I could well die of in Holland."

As he talked, I had been thinking hard and fast. I should have to spare him. I saw that. But — I saw something else too.

"I'll keep your ridiculous secret, Mr. Starr, on one condition," I said.

"You've only to name it."

"Invite me to go with you on the trip."

"My *dear* fellow, for heaven's sake don't ask me the one thing I can't do. It's cruelty to animals. It isn't *my* trip. I'm a guest. Perhaps you don't understand —— "

"Yes, I do. Van Buren told me. He mentioned that you hadn't been able to get a skipper to take the motor-boat through the canals."

"That's true. But we shan't be delayed. We have our choice between two chaps with fair references; not ideal men, perhaps; but you don't need an admiral to get you through a herring-pond —— "

"Each canal is different from every other. You must have a first-rate man, who knows every inch of the way, whatever route you choose, or you'll get into serious trouble. Now, as you've been praising yourself, I'll follow your example. You couldn't find a skipper who knows more about 'botoring' and Dutch waterways than I do, and I volunteer for the job. I go if you go; there's the offer."

"Are you serious?" All his nonsense was suddenly forgotten.

"Absolutely."

"Why do you want to go? You must have a reason."

"I have. It's much the same as yours."

"I'm blowed! Then you've met — Them."

"I've seen them. Apparently that's about all you've done."

"You mean, if I won't get you on board as skipper you'll give me away?"

I was silent. I did not now mean anything of the kind, for it would be impossible to betray the engaging wretch. But I was willing that he should think my silence gave consent.

"They would know you weren't a common hired skipper. How could I explain you?"

"Why, say you've a Dutch friend who has — *kindly* offered to go, as you can't find any one else who's competent for the

job. You'd better not mention your friend's name at first, if you can avoid it. As the ladies have been anxious about the skipper, and asked van Buren to get one, they'll probably be thankful it's all right, and only too glad to accept a friend of yours in the place."

"Poor, deceived angels! What's to prevent your snatching one of them from under my very nose?"

"You must run the risk of that. Besides, you needn't worry about it till you make up your mind which angel you want."

"I should naturally want whichever one you did. We are made like that."

"If you don't agree, and they go 'botoring' without you, you can't get either."

"That's true. Most disagreeable things are. And there's just a chance, if you get dangerous, that Tibe might polish you off. I saw the way he looked at you. Well, needs must when somebody drives. It's a bargain then. I'll tell the girls what a kind, generous Dutch friend I have. We'll be villains together."

IX

WE settled that Starr should see Miss Van Buren and Miss Rivers and tell them that skipper, chauffeur, and chaperon all being provided, there was nothing to prevent the tour beginning to-morrow. Having done this, without bringing in his obliging friend's name, he was so meet me at the Rowing Club at three o'clock with a detailed report of all that had happened up to date.

Never was time slower in passing. Each minute seemed as long as the dying speech of a tragedian who fancies himself in a death scene. I wanted to use some of these minutes in writing to Robert, but it would be premature to tell him that I was going to look after his cousin and her sister on the trip, as the ladies might abandon it, rather than put up with my society.

When ten minutes past three came, and no Starr, I was certain that they would not have me. I could hardly have been gloomier if I'd been waiting for a surgical operation. But another five minutes brought my confederate, and the first sight of his face sent my spirits up with a bound.

"It's all right," he said. "They've come back from Scheveningen. I saw them at their hotel, and they're more beautiful than ever. They were prostrate with grief at hearing I hadn't been able to get hold of a skipper; consequently they were too excited to ask your name when I gave them the cheering news that a Dutch friend had come to the rescue. They simply swallowed you whole, and clamored for the next course, so I added the — er — glad tidings of my aunt's

arrival this evening, and poured the last drop of joy in their cup by saying we could start to-morrow. They're going to bring most of their things on board after tea this afternoon, about five. Oh, by the way, just as I was leaving, Miss Van Buren did call after me, 'Is your friend nice?' "

I laughed. "What did you answer?"

"I thought one more fib among so many couldn't matter, so I said you were. Heaven forgive me. By-the-by, are you really Dutch, or is that another — figure of speech?"

"I always think and speak of myself as wholly Dutch," I replied. "But my mother is English. By-the-by, I must telegraph her; and I must write my man to bring me some clothes the first thing to-morrow morning. Then you'd better send for the chauffeur you've engaged; and we'll go together to interview him on the boat before the ladies come. I think — er — it won't be best for me to meet them till to-morrow. Are you sure your chauffeur's a good man?"

"Not at all," said Starr, airily. "I merely know that he's a very young youth, who makes you feel like a grandfather at twenty-seven; who wriggles and turns pink if you speak to him suddenly, and when he wants his handkerchief to mop his perpetually moist forehead, pulls yards of cotton waste out of his pocket, by mistake. I've only his word for it — which I couldn't understand, as it was in Dutch — that he has the slightest knowledge of any motor. But he showed me written references, and seemed so proud of what they set forth, I thought they must be all right, though I couldn't read them."

"You're a queer fellow!" I exclaimed.

"Well, you see, I'm an artist — neither motorist nor botorist. By the way, what are you, beyond being van Buren's friend?"

"A Jack of several trades," said I. "I know a bit about horses, botors, motors; I fancy I'm a judge of dogs (I congratulate you on Tibe), also of chauffeurs, so come along and we'll put yours through his paces."

It now appeared that Starr had the youth on board. So I sent my two telegrams, and we started to walk to the boat. On the way Starr told me more than I had heard from Robert about his first dealings with "Lorelei," and we discussed details of the trip. The ladies have no choice, it appears, except that they will feel ill-used if allowed to miss anything. As for Starr, he confessed blissful ignorance of Holland.

"I want to go where cows wear coats, and women wear gold helmets, and dogs have revolving kennels," he said. "And I want to paint everything I see."

"Cows wear coats at Gouda. I expect you read that in Carlyle's 'Sartor Resartus.' Women wear gold helmets in Friesland. Dogs have revolving kennels in Zeeland," I told him. "And if you want to paint everything you see, we shall be gone a long time."

"All the better," said Starr.

I agreed.

"It would be useful if *you* could plan out a trip," he went on. "It would help to account for you, you know, and make you popular."

I caught at this idea. There are a good many places that I should like to show Miss Van Buren, and visit with her. "I should have preferred her seeing my country on our wedding-trip," I said to myself. "This is the next best, though, and we can have the honeymoon in Italy." But aloud I remarked that I would map out something and submit it to my passengers in the morning.

My mother laughs, telling me that I must always go in for any new fad, whatever it may be, and that she expects some day to see several makes of airship tethered on the lawn at Liliendaal, or tied to our chimneys at The Hague in winter. There's something in her jibe, perhaps; but it would be a queer thing, indeed, if a son of the water-country didn't turn to "botoring," provided he had any soul for sport. We Hol-

landers made practical use of motor-boats while the people of dry lands still poked ridicule at them in comic illustrated papers; therefore this will be by no means my first experience. I had that three years ago with a racer, and again with a barge which I fitted up with a twenty horse-power motor, and used for a whole summer, after which, in a generous mood, I gave her as a wedding-gift to my chauffeur, whose bride's greatest ambition was for barge-life. Since that time I've always meant to get something good in the botoring line, but haven't made up my mind what it ought to be.

I did myself no more than justice in telling Starr that I was as desirable a man as he could find for skipper; and I shook hands with myself for every hour of botoring I had done. Thanks to past experience I can now do chauffeur's work, if necessary, as well as skipper's.

We found the "very young youth" on deck, industriously polishing brass-work, and his complexion bore out Starr's description as I questioned him about his former situations. It seems there was only one, and with a small boat; but the motor was the same as this.

The arrangement of "Lorelei's" deck aft pleases me particularly, for it might have been designed to suit my purpose. That purpose is to have as much of Miss Van Buren's society as possible during this trip. Consequently I saw with pleasure that the passengers in their deck-chairs must group round the skipper at his wheel, as there is no other comfortable place. There will be no notice up on board "Lorelei": "Please do not speak to the man at the wheel." The more he is spoken to — by the right person — the better he will like his job. What I have to pray for is dry weather, that the ladies may spend their days on deck, for just as much time as they spend below I shall consider that I am wasting. Indeed, I regret the attractiveness of the cabins, for I fear there may be a temptation to dawdle there, or lie among cushions on the comfortable

seat-bunks on a gray or chilly day. "I hope she's as much interested in scenery as she apparently is in history," I said to myself as Starr and I wandered over the boat, "for the skipper-job can be combined with the business of lecturer and *cicerone*, if that proves a bid for popularity."

Aft of the cabins is the motor-house; and hearing our voices through the skylight, chauffeur Hendrik left the brass-work and came to stand by his engine. I immediately determined to study this engine thoroughly, so that if Hendrik's intelligence prove untrustworthy in an emergency, mine may be prepared to assist it.

He soon saw that it was useless to "show off" before me, but he enjoyed explaining the motor in broken English to Starr. The American artist heard with a vague smile the difference between the ordinary four-cycle engine of an automobile, and the two-cycle engine of this marine motor, with its piston receiving an impulse at each down stroke; tried to understand how the charge of vaporized petrol was drawn into the crank-chamber, and there slightly compressed; how the gas afterwards traveled along a by-pass into the firing chamber at the upper part of the cylinder, to be further compressed by the up-stroke of the piston and fired by the sparking plug, while the burnt gases escaped through a port uncovered by the piston in its downward strokes, admission and exhaust being thus controlled by the piston movement alone.

"Great heavens! I wronged this good youth," the patient listener cried, when he found a chance to speak. "I thought him all pinkness, and perspiration, and purple velvet slippers, but he can pull information by the yard out of his brain, as he does cotton waste out of his pocket. Unfortunately, it's waste too, as far as I'm concerned; for I don't know any more about this motor now than I did when he began. The tap of my intelligence always seems to be turned off the minute

anything technical or mechanical is mentioned. Some of those things he said sounded more like the description of a lunatic asylum than anything else, and the only impression left on my mind is one of dreadful gloom."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it seems impossible that anything which has to do so much at the same time as this engine does, can remember to do half of it. It will certainly fail, and blow up with those we love on board. I never thought of that until now, and shouldn't if Hendrik hadn't explained things to me."

"We can't blow up unless the petrol gets on fire," said I, "and as the tank's away at the bow of the boat and the petrol descends to the engine by gravity and not pressure, you needn't have nightmare on that subject."

"That's another horror I hadn't realized," groaned Starr. "I took things for granted, and trusted other people to know them. A whole tank of petrol at the bow! How much will there be in it?"

"Enough to last four days."

"One of the ladies is sure to set it on fire when she's curling her hair with a spirit-lamp. Yet we can't forbid them to curl their hair on their own boat. Perhaps they'd better sleep on the barge, after all. I meant it to be for the men of the party."

"Nonsense," said I. "They're reasonable creatures. Besides, Miss Van Buren's hair curls naturally "

"How can you know?"

"Well, I do." And before my eyes arose the picture of a bright goddess of foam and spray.

"Hum! I begin to see which way the wind blows. I'm not sure she isn't the one I myself —— "

"We were talking about the motor," I cut in. "The water jacketing seems thoroughly carried out; and when the party's assembled on deck, it will hear no more noise than the buzzing of a big bee, as the exhaust is led away below the water-line.

It won't be bad in the cabins either, even when they keep the sliding door open, for this screen of thick sail-cloth will deaden what sound there is. And it was a smart idea to utilize the power of the magneto to light up the whole boat with those incandescent burners."

"Your mechanical information, on top of Hendrik's, is giving me a kind of acute mental dyspepsia," sighed Starr. "I hate well-informed people; they're so fond of telling you things you don't want to know. Still, I realize that you're going to be useful in a way, so I suppose I must make the best of you; and, anyhow, we shan't see much of each other, except at meals."

"Shan't we? Why, are you going to spend most of your time on board your barge, steering?"

"Not I. I've engaged a man. Didn't I tell you. A nice, handy man, not too big for his boots, or rather, his carpet slippers. He'll cook, sweep, dust, and make beds as well as keep the barge steady."

"While I'm skipper of 'Lorelei,' nobody wears carpet slippers, or purple velvet ones either, on board this boat or her tender. I suppose, if you're not going to steer, you mean to occupy yourself in your studio, painting. A wise arrangement —— "

"From your point of view. But it isn't my intention. I shall — if the ladies don't object — sit mostly on 'Lorelei's' deck, making sketches, and entertaining them as well as I know how — though not with technical information."

"I shall be there to give them that, if they want it," said I.

"*You?* You'll have to be at the bow, skippering."

"I don't skipper at the bow, thank you. I skipper on deck aft, where I stand at the wheel and have full control of the engine through this long lever that's carried up from the engine-room."

"Hang it, I thought Hendrik, as chauffeur, would have to

be there, and you'd keep a sort of outlook with a binnacle or something, for'rard. You *are* going to be a regular Albatross to my Ancient Mariner, aren't you?"

"Don't forget that it's by grace of the Albatross that you're a Mariner at all."

"I shall call you 'Alb,' when I feel your weight too much," said Starr, and then we two villains of the piece could not forbear a grin in each other's faces. I even found myself wondering if the Ancient One and his Bird might not form for one another a kind of attachment of habit, in the end.

It's certainly a queer association, this of ours, but as the Mariner proposed to do, we began to make the best of it; and we finished my visit to the boat on outwardly friendly terms. We even sat on deck and put our heads together over my note-book, in which I jotted down a plan of the tour. With "Lorelei," I assured him, we had but to choose our route, for as she draws only from three to three and a half feet of water, all the waterways are open to us. Did she draw more, she would be useless, even in certain rivers, in a dry season such as this is proving, and in many small canals at any season. There's only one thing which may bother us in the Frisian Meers, where we can't shove with a quant pole, or if we venture out to sea: we have no means of propulsion except the motor, and as we carry no mast, we cannot set so much as a yard of canvas. If anything should go wrong with the motor, brilliant "Lorelei" will instantly become a mere hulk at the mercy of wind and wave. However, as Starr remarked sagely, we can stop in port for wind and wave, and be very happy.

As we talked, down on a page of my note-book went a roughly sketched map of Holland, my idea being to begin with Gouda, going on to Leiden, slipping through the villages of South Holland, which seem strange to travelers, and skirting the great polder that was once the famed Haarlemmer-Meer. Then, having seen Haarlem sitting on her throne of

flowers, to pass on, giving a few days to Amsterdam and interesting places in the neighborhood, watery market-towns and settlements of the merchant princes. Next in order the curious island of Marken, and the artists' haunts at Volendam. From there, to turn toward the north and the Dead Cities of the Zuider Zee, crossing afterwards to Friesland in search of beauties in golden helmets, and lingering for a while among the Frisian Meers. Later, we might work our way through Holland's most desolate and savage province, Drenthe, to the hills of Gelderland (my native country), and finish the trip with a grand climax in Zeeland, most mysterious and picturesque of all, half hidden in the sea.

I traced the proposed route for Starr, telling him that we could do such a tour in five weeks or eight, according to the inclinations of the travelers, and the length of time they cared to spend in each place. As to that, the ladies must decide, I said, and choose whether they would sleep each night on "Lorelei," or see more of Dutch life by going to hotels. But, in any case, I must plan to bring the boat each evening near enough civilization to obtain supplies.

"A good itinerary," said the Mariner, approving his Albatross, "but I warn you I shall claim half the credit. When you see me swaggering, and hear me boasting of the plans my friend Brederode and I have mapped out, contradict me if you dare. I *will* defy you in some things, or I shall burst of sheer spite; and we can test it now, if you like, for here they come."

It was true. They were in a cab, with luggage under the driver's feet. I had let time slip away, forgetting that I meant to escape before five, when Starr had told me they were due.

But I was determined not to meet them now. There was still time for Miss Van Buren to find some excuse and wreck the tour, if she were annoyed by my obstinate determination to know her. To-morrow there will not be time, unless she

cares to make a scene; and I don't think she is a girl to make scenes.

"No. I'll leave your friends to you, for the present," said I. "We ought to start by ten to-morrow, and I'll be on hand at nine."

"I know not whether to curse or bless you," said the Mariner. But I gave him no time to do either. I was off, and out of the way before I could be noticed and recognized by the occupants of the cab. Then, back to the Club I came to write a short letter to Robert, and to jot down a few happenings for my own benefit later.

X

IT was nine in the morning — a clean-washed morning of blue and gold — when I arrived on board "Lorelei," with a small box which my man brought me from Liliendaal, according to telegraphed orders.

No one was there but the chauffeur, though on board the barge "Waterspin" the "handy man" had arrived, and was settling into his new quarters. Toon de Jongh is his name, and I conceived a liking for his grave brown face, at sight. I know his type well, a type which excels in deeds, not words, and was bred in the Low Countries by certain policies of Philip Second of Spain. He liked me too, for some reason or other, I saw by his eyes, in a way one never mistakes but can never explain.

I had to find my quarters on the barge, and going below, on the first door I saw a visiting card of Mr. Ronald L. Starr's conspicuously pinned, with the one word "Alb" printed large upon it, in red ink. Chuckling, I took possession of the cabin, hauled my things out from my box, and had got them mostly packed in lockers and drawers, when I heard the sound of voices on "Lorelei."

She was there. What would she say when she discovered that the man she had "thanked enough and didn't want to see again" had foisted himself upon her party?

The evil moment couldn't be postponed for long. I might give them time to go below, and add the contents of their dressing-bags to the belongings they had bestowed in the cabins yesterday afternoon, but that would take fifteen minutes at most, and then they would be wanting to start. I should

have to get on board "Lorelei," be introduced, and face the music, whether it played the "Rogue's March," or "Hail, the Conquering Hero!"

The sound of girls' laughter was so upsetting that I couldn't decide what to do with my collars and neckties. I wandered aimlessly about the cabin with my hands full, grumbling aloud, "What an ass you are!" and hadn't yet made up my mind to cross over to "Lorelei" when Starr pounded on the half-open door.

"Thank goodness, you're here!" he exclaimed, as the door fell back and revealed me.

"What has happened to make you give thanks?" I asked, disposing hurriedly of the neckties.

"Any port in a storm — even Albport. And there *is* a storm, an awful storm; at least "Lorelei's" staggering about as if she were half-seas over, and if you don't get us off at once every soul on board will be lost, or, what's worse, seasick. A nice beginning for the trip!"

I am so much at home on the water that I hadn't noticed the tossing and lolloping of the barge, but I realized now what was the matter. The morning was fresh, with a gusty wind blowing up the Maas, against the tide running strongly out; and consequently little "Lorelei" and sturdy "Waterspin" strained at their moorings like chained dogs who spy a bone just beyond their reach.

I didn't stop to answer, but bolted off the barge and onto the motor-boat.

Toon and Hendrik cast off the moorings, the chauffeur flew below to set his engine going; I took the wheel, pushed over the starting lever, the little propeller began to turn, and we were away on the first of the watery miles which stretch before us, for joy or sorrow.

Starr had followed Hendrik below, and just as the motor was getting well to work, revolving under my feet at the rate

of six hundred revolutions a minute, I heard his voice shouting ——

"Hullo, hullo! catch the dog! — you up there."

At the same instant arose a babel of cries, "Oh, my angel! Don't let him drown! Save him!" and the Emperor Tiberius shot up the companion as if launched from a catapult. Unused to engines and a life on the wave, frightened by the teuf-teuf of the motor, his next bound would have carried him overboard into the river; but hanging on to the wheel with one hand, with the other I seized the dog by the collar — a new, resplendent collar — just as somebody else, rushing to the rescue from below, caught him by the tail.

It was Miss Van Buren.

For a second — I bending down, she stretching up — our faces were neighbors, and I had time to see her expression undergo several lightning changes — surprise, incredulity, and a few others not as easy to read — before she retired, leaving Tibe to me. Instead of coming up on deck as she had evidently intended to do, she vanished, and a head exquisitely hatted and blue-veiled appeared in place of hers.

A moment later the tiny lady of the arbor, transformed into Parisian elegance by an effective white yachting costume, with a coquettish blue yachting-cap on her gray hair, the goggling effect of the glasses softened by the floating folds of azure chiffon, arrived to succor her beloved. She started slightly, staring at me through veil and spectacles, and I deduced that whatever Starr had told his "aunt" about the skipper, it had not prepared her to meet the man of the arbor. Those hidden eyes recognized me, and took in the situation.

Under their fire I realized that the success of my adventure might largely depend upon the chaperon; and if, suspecting something more than met her gaze, she should strike an attitude of disapproval, she could prejudice the girls against the

skipper, and so manoeuver that he had his trouble for his pains.

With this danger ahead, I redoubled my attentions to Tiberius; but it was fortunate for me that the doubts he entertained of the man in the arbor were chased away by gratitude for the man on the boat. If it had not been so, such is the primitive sincerity of dog kind — especially bulldog kind — no bribe in my power to offer could have induced him to dissimulate. I knew this, and trembled; but Tibe, being an animal of parts, was not long in comprehending that the hand on his collar meant well by him. He deigned to fawn, and meeting his glance at close quarters, I read his dog-soul through the brook-brown depths of the clear eyes. After that moment, in which we came to a full understanding one of the other, once and for all, I knew that Tibe's wrinkled mask, his terrible mouth, and the ferocious tusks standing up like two stalagmites in the black, protruding under jaw, disguised a nature almost too amiable and confiding for a world of hypocrites. Tragic fate, to seem in the shallow eyes of strangers a monster of evil from whom to flee, while your warm heart, bursting with love and kindness, sends you chasing those who avoid you, eager to demonstrate affection! Such a fate is destined to be Tibe's, so long as he may live; but in this first instant of our real acquaintance he felt that I at least saw through his disguise; and under the nose and spectacles of his mistress he sealed our friendship with a wet kiss on my sleeve.

"Good boy!" said I, and meant it. He had given me a character, and had placed me upon a sound footing with one who would be, I foresaw, a Power on "Lorelei."

"Thank you *so* much!" said she, with the promised burr-r so pronounced in her accent that she must, I thought, have spent the night in practising it. She then carefully selected the best chair, and took from another a blue silk cushion which matched her yachting-cap and veil.

As she sat down, making a footstool of Tibe, and displaying two exquisitely shod feet in brand new suède shoes, Miss Rivers appeared, pale and interesting.

"I *do* hope you're better, my poor child," purred the Chaperon.

"Oh, thank you, dear Lady MacNairne, I shall be quite right now we've started."

This interchange of civilities told that the Mariner's "Aunt Fay" had already contrived to ingratiate herself with her charges.

Miss Rivers sank into the nearest chair, closing her eyes, while I stood aloof and turned the wheel; but presently the languid lashes lifted, and she became conscious of me. Then her eyes grew big. She remembered me from the day at the Prinzenhof, or the Horse Show, perhaps. Evidently Starr had not named me yet, nor had Miss Van Buren, in descending after our brief encounter, put any questions. Whether this boded ill or well, I could not decide, but longed to get suspense over; and I was not kept waiting.

I heard Starr's voice below urging Miss Van Buren on deck. "Don't bother about putting everything away," he said. "Do it later. You must say good-by to Rotterdam. Who knows what will have happened to us before we get back?"

It would not be my fault if two of the party were not engaged, I was thinking hopefully, as Miss Van Buren's eyes — rising from below like stars above a dark horizon — met mine. There was no recognition in them. To all appearance oblivious of ever having seen my insignificant features on land or sea, she came smiling up, on the friendliest terms with Starr.

The vacant chair, most conveniently placed for her, was close to the wheel, and I hoped that she would take it. But rather than be thus trapped, she stepped over Tibe and pushed past her stepsister with an "I beg your pardon, dear."

The Mariner gave no glance at me, but there was a catch in his voice which betokened a twinkle of the eye, as he said ——

"Aunt Fay, Miss Van Buren and Miss Rivers, I must introduce the friend I told you about: our skipper, Jonkheer Brederode."

Miss Rivers smiled delightfully, with just such a flush of ingenuous surprise as I should have liked to see on another face.

"Why, how curious," she exclaimed, "that you should be a friend of Mr. Starr's! I think we have *almost* met Jonkheer Brederode before, haven't we, Nell?"

"*Have* we?" sweetly inquired Miss Van Buren. "I'm a little near-sighted, and I've such a wretched memory for faces. Unless I notice people particularly, I have to be introduced at least twice before it occurs to me to bow."

"Oh, but, *Nell*," protested Miss Rivers. "Surely you know we saw Mr. — no, *Jonkheer* Brederode — with your cousin at the Museum in Delft, and then afterwards you —— "

"People's *clothes* make so much difference," remarked Miss Van Buren.

"Oh, but I wasn't thinking of your sea adventure, so much as when Jonkheer Brederode rode in the contest —— "

"I'm afraid I was looking at the horses," cut in her stepsister.

If Robert had been on board at this juncture he would probably have wished to box his cousin's ears, but I had no such desire, though mine were tingling. In fact, I should have enjoyed boxing Robert's; for I saw that, with the best intentions in the world (and intentions are dangerous weapons!), my too-loyal friend had in some way contrived to make me appear insufferable. Perhaps he'd given the impression that I had boasted an intention to meet her within a given time, and she took this for my brutal way of carrying out the boast.

"What is a Jonkheer?" the *pseudo* Lady MacNairne demanded of Starr.

"I don't know exactly," he admitted.

"*Don't* you? But, nephew dear, how can you help knowing, when you have an *old* friend who is one?"

(Was there a spice of malice in this question?)

"You see, almost ever since I've known him, I've thought of him as Alb," Starr explained hastily. "Alb is a kind of — er — pet name."

"I suppose it means something nice in Dutch," said Miss Rivers, in the soft, pretty way she has, which would fain make every one around her happy. "But I think Mr. van Buren told us that 'Jonkheer' was like our baronet; Jonkheer instead of 'Sir,' isn't it?"

"Something of the sort," I answered.

"It sticks in the throat, if you'll excuse me for saying so, like a bit of crust," remarked Aunt Fay.

"You can all call him Alb," said Starr.

"Why not compromise with Skipper?" asked Miss Van Buren, looking at my yachting-cap (rather a nice one) with serene impertinence. "We shall probably never have the pleasure of knowing him on land, so why stumble over Dutch names or titles? He has come on board 'Lorelei' to be our skipper, hasn't he? So he would probably prefer to be *called* 'Skipper.'"

Starr leaned down to pat Tibe, shaking all over. "Ha, ha, ha!" he gasped. "I never *saw* such a funny tail; I do hope it isn't going to give me hysterics."

But nobody else laughed, and Miss Rivers was gazing at her stepsister in a shocked, questioning way, her violet eyes saying as plainly as if they spoke ——

"My darling girl, what possesses you to be so rude to an inoffensive foreigner?"

I should have liked to ask the same question, in the same

words; but I said nothing, did nothing except turn the wheel with the air of that Miller who grinds slowly but exceedingly small, and smile a hard, confident smile which warned the enemy ——

"Oh yes, you *are* going to know me on land, and love me on land, so you might as well make up your mind to what has to come."

She caught the look, which forcibly dragged hers down from my hat-brim, and I am convinced that she read its meaning. It made her hate me a degree worse, of course; but what is an extra stone rolled behind the doors of the resisting citadel, or a gallon more or less or boiling oil to dash on the heads of the besiegers? If they are determined, it comes to the same thing in the end.

Fortunately for the spirits of the other players who were "on" in this scene (in a subordinate capacity), the fair Enemy was not of the nature to sulk. True, of free will she did not address me; but having shown her opinion of and intentions toward the person deserving punishment, she did not weary her arm with continued castigation. Instead, she gave herself up heart and soul to delight in her first taste of "botoring." She basked in it, she reveled in it; had she been a kitten, I think she would have purred in sheer physical enjoyment of it.

"*My* boat! My *boat!*" she repeated, lingering over the words as if they had been cream and sugar. "Oh, I wonder if it *knows* it's My Boat? I wish it could. I should like it to get fond of me. I *know* it's alive. Feel its heart beat. What Tibe is to Lady MacNairne, 'Lorelei' is going to be to me. We never lived before, did we, Phil? And aren't you glad we came? Who knows what will become of us after this, for we certainly never can go home again and take up life where we left it off."

"You shan't. I'll see to that," I said to myself; but this time she was not looking even at the brim of my cap. Her

eyes, luminous with childlike happiness, searched and photographed each new feature of river-life that skimmed swiftly past us.

"We might become motor-boat pirates," she went on. "There'd be no anti-climax about that; and I dare say we could make a living. We'd hoist the black flag whenever we came to a nice lonely stretch of water, with a rich-looking barge or two, or a fine country house on shore, and the work would begin. Tibe would terrorize our victims. But, speaking of the black flag, I see the star-spangled banner floats o'er the deck of the free and the cabins of the brave. How charming of you to think of putting it there, Mr. Starr! It would never have occurred to me."

"It would have been charming, if it *had* occurred to me," said the Mariner; "but it didn't."

"Perhaps our skipper can explain the mystery," remarked the Chaperon, graciously.

I smiled. "I happened to have the little silk flag," said I, "and as the owner of the boat is an American, I took the liberty of flying her colors from the mast to-day; they went up early this morning. But we have another flag with us for emergencies — that of my Sailing and Rowing Club, — which, when we show it, will give us the right to enter sluices — or locks, as you call them — ahead of anything else."

"Alb, you have your uses," observed the Mariner. "Why can't we keep your flag up all the time — under the Stars and Stripes?"

"It wouldn't be fair to make use of it except in extreme cases," I said. "All these lighter and bargemen whom we see have their living to get. Time's money to them, while it's pleasure to us. It's right that they should get through ahead, when they're first comers; but there may be occasions when we shall need our advantage; and till then I'll keep the flag up my sleeve, with your permission."

"I never thought to feel so *safe* on a motor-boat," exclaimed Miss Rivers. "Since we made up our minds to come — or rather Nell made up hers — I've added another prayer to those I've been accustomed to say for years — that we shouldn't blow up, or, if we *had* to blow up, that we shouldn't realize long enough beforehand to be frightened; and that we should blow into quite little pieces which couldn't know anything about it afterwards. But now I've such a peaceful feeling, I have to make myself remember that any instant may be my last."

"I wouldn't try," said Miss Van Buren. "I suppose, when one thinks of it, worse things could happen to one on a motor-boat than in a motor-car, because there's water all round; but it seems so heavenly restful, rather like motoring in heaven might be, and no frightened horses, or barking dogs, or street children to worry you."

"I pity people on steamboats, just as the other day, when we motored, I pitied people in stuffy black trains," said Miss Rivers. "But I don't pity the people on lighters and barges. Don't they look delightful? I should love to live on that one with the curly-tailed red lion on the prow, and the green house with white embroidered curtains and flower-pots, and sweet little china animals in the windows. It's called 'Anna Maria,' and oh, it's worked by a *motor!*"

"Lots of them are, nowadays," I said. "They're easy to rig up, and save work. I happen to know 'Anna Maria,' and the lady she's named after, who lives on board and thinks herself the happiest woman on earth — or water. There she goes, on her way to the kitchen, with her baby in her arms. Pretty creatures both, aren't they?"

"Pictures!" cried Miss Rivers; and her stepsister, who at the moment was being particularly nice to the Mariner (I fancy by way of showing the Outcast how nice she can be — to others), glanced up from a map of Holland, which Starr had

opened, across his knees. "It's like a very young Madonna and Child, painted by a Dutch master. I wish you could introduce us."

"Perhaps I will, when we come back this way," said I. "You shall go on board and have tea with Anna Maria and her baby, and the husband too, who's as good-looking as the rest of the family. They would be delighted, and proud to show off their floating home, which saved Anna Maria's life."

"How ? It sounds like a story."

"So it is — a humble romance. Anna Maria's the daughter of a bargeman, and was born and brought up on a barge. When she was seventeen and keeping house-boat for her father (the mother died when she was a child) the poor man had an accident, and was drowned. There wasn't much money saved up for Anna Maria, so the barge was sold, and she had to live on dry land, and learn how to be a dressmaker. She was as miserable as a goldfish would be if you took it out of its bowl and laid it on the table. In a few months she'd fallen into a decline, and though, just at that time, she met a dashing young chauffeur, who took a fancy to her pretty, pale face, even love wasn't strong enough to save her. The chauffeur, poor fellow, thought there was no flower in the garden of girls as sweet as his white snowdrop. He felt, if he could only afford to buy a lighter for himself, they might marry, and the bride's life might be saved. But it was out of the question, and perhaps the idyl would have ended in tragedy, had he not confided his troubles to his master. That master, as it happened, had a lighter which he'd fitted up with a motor. He'd used it all summer, and got his money's worth of fun out of it; so when he heard the story, he told the chauffeur he would give him the thing as it stood, for a wedding present, and it must be rechristened 'Anna Maria.'

"What a lamb of a master! I quite love him!" exclaimed

Miss Van Buren, before she remembered that she was talking to One beyond the Pale.

"There wasn't much merit; he was tired of his toy," I answered carelessly; but I felt my face grow red.

"I don't believe it a bit. He just said that," cried Miss Rivers. "I should love him too. Is he a Dutchman?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if he was half English, half Dutch," remarked Starr, good-naturedly.

"Or if he was making our wheel go round now," finished Aunt Fay, pulling Tibe's ear.

"Oh!" said Miss Van Buren, and buried her nose in the map.

She and Starr were tracing, or pretending to trace, our route to Gouda, whither we were going, and where we expected to lunch. Hurriedly she threw herself into a discussion with him as to whether we were now in the Lek or the Maas. Reason said Maas, but the map said Lek, though it was a thing, thought the lady, about which there could be no two opinions; it must be one or the other.

As a matter of fact, there are many opinions, and as I knew the history of the dispute, after all she had to turn to me, and listen. I talked to Starr, and at her, explaining how only experts could tell one river from another here, and even experts differed.

"Our waters are split up into so many channels that they're as difficult to separate one from the other as the twisted strands in a plait of hair," said I. "It was like Napoleon's colossal cheek, wasn't it, to claim the Netherlands for France, because they were formed from the alluvium of French rivers?"

Instantly the Chaperon ceased to admire Tibe's new and expensive collar, and opened a silver chain bag, also glittering with newness, which she had in her lap. From this she brought forth a note-book of Russia leather, and began to write with a

stylographic pen, which had dangled in a gold case on a richly furnished chatelaine. This little lady had "done" herself well since yesterday.

"I shall take notes of everything," she announced. "That bit about Napoleon goes down first."

"Surely you knew, Aunt Fay," said the Mariner, with a warning in his lifted eyebrows.

"I don't know anything about Holland, except that it's flat and wet," she replied, defying him, as she can afford to do, now that, once an aunt, she must be always an aunt, as far as this tour is concerned. "It's not the fashion in *my* part of Scotland for ladies of position to know things about foreign countries they've not visited. It's considered frumpish, and though I may not be as young as I once was, I am *not* frumpish."

She certainly is not. The real Lady MacNairne does not dress as smartly, or have such an air of Parisian elegance as this mysterious little upstart has put on since assuming her part. Save for the gray hair and the hideous glasses, there could scarcely be a daintier figure than that of the Mariner's false Aunt Fay.

"However," she went on, "my doctor has recommended a tonic, and I shouldn't wonder if a spice of information might be a mental stimulant. Anyhow, I intend to try it, and ask questions of everybody about everything."

All this she said with a quaint, bird-like air, and I began to be impressed with the curious fascination which emanates from this strange, small person. I am in her secret. I know she is a fraud, though of all else concerning her I am in ignorance — perhaps blissful ignorance. I have none too much respect for the little wretch, despite her gray hairs; yet, somehow, I felt at this moment that I was *on her side*. I was afraid that, if she asked any favor of me, I should run to do it; and I could imagine myself being ass enough to quail before the mite's

Liliputian displeasure. As for Starr, I could see that he dared not say his soul was his own, if she laid claim to it. He might raise his eyebrows, or telegraph with his eyelids, but a certain note in that crisp, youthful-sounding voice, would reduce him to complete subjection, in what our German cousins call an *augenblick*. No wonder that Tiberius — who looks as if he could play lion to her martyr without a single rehearsal — fawns, crawls, and wriggles like the merest puppy at the lifting of her tiny finger, when she wills — as is seldom — to be obeyed by him. All must feel the same queer power in the woman, be we dogs or men.

"Well, I'm glad you got your country back from Napoleon," said Miss Rivers. "Nobody, except the Dutch, could have made it so cozy, so radiantly clean and comfortable. *Dear* little Holland!"

I laughed. "Dear little Holland! Yes, that's the way you all pet and patronize our Hollow Land, and chuck it under the chin, so to speak. You think of it as a nice little toy country, to come and play with, and laugh at for its quaintness. And why shouldn't you? But it strikes us Netherlanders as funny, that point of view of yours, if we have a sense of humor — and we have, sometimes! You see, we've a good memory for our past. We know what we're built upon.

"Think of the making of Holland, though I grant you it's difficult, when you look at this peaceful landscape; but try to call up something as different as darkness is to light. Forget the river, and the houses, and the pretty branching canals, and see nothing but marshes, wild and terrible, with sluggish rivers crawling through mud-banks to the sea, beaten back by fierce tides, to overflow into oozy meers and stagnant pools. Think of raging winds, never still, the howling of seas, and the driving of pitiless rains. No other views but those, and no definite forms rising out of the water save great forest trees, growing so densely that no daylight shines through the black

roof of branches. Imagine the life of our forefathers, who fled here from an existence so much more dreadful that they clung to the mud-banks and fought for them, a never-ending battle with the sea. That was the beginning of the Netherlands, as it was of Venice, and the fugitives built as the Venetians built, on piles, with wattles. If you've seen Venice, you'll often be reminded of it here. And what rest have we had since those beginnings? If not fighting the sea, we had to fight Spain and England, and even now our battles aren't over. They never will be, while we keep our heads above water. Every hour of every day and night some one is fighting to save the Netherlands from the fate of Atlantis. While her men fight she's safe; but if they rested, this 'peaceful, comfortable little country' would be blotted out under the waters, as so many provinces vanished under the Zuider Zee in the thirteenth century, and others, at other times, have been swept away."

"Do you think our motor-boat could ride on the flood, and drag 'Waterspin,' if any of the most important dykes or dams happened to burst?" inquired the Chaperon. "I hope so, for what you've been saying makes one feel exactly like a female member of the Ark party."

Everybody laughed; but her joke pricked me to shame of my harangue.

"Nothing will 'happen to burst,'" I assured her. "We Dutch don't lose our sleep over such 'ifs.' Every country has something to dread, hasn't it? Drought in India, earthquakes in Italy, cyclones and blizzards in America, and so on. Our menace is water; but then, it's our friend as well as foe, and we've subdued it to our daily uses, as every canal we pass can prove. Besides, there's something else we're able to do with it. The popular belief is that, at Amsterdam, one key is kept in the central arsenal which can instantly throw open sluices to inundate the whole country in case we should be in danger of invasion."

"But you'd drown your land and yourselves, as well as the enemy," exclaimed Aunt Fay.

"Better drown than lose the liberty we've paid for with so much blood. The old spirit's in us still, I hope, though we may seem slow-going, comfort-loving fellows in everyday life. When we make up our minds to do a thing, we're prepared to suffer for the sake of carrying it through."

Again I met Miss Van Buren's eyes, and I think she realized that I am typically Dutch.

XI

ROTTERDAM lay far behind us now. We'd passed the busy, crowded water-thoroughfares, as thickly lined with barges and lighters as streets with houses, and were nearing the point where the river, disguised as the Issel, turns with many curves toward Gouda. We had a few whiffs from brickfields and other ugly industries that scar the banks, but the windings of the Issel bore us swiftly to regions of grassy meadows, and waving reeds, threatening sometimes to lose us in strange no-thoroughfares of water more like separate lakes and round ponds, than the flowing reaches of a river.

Here the despised Albatross was worth his weight in gold. In charge of a skipper not familiar with every foot of the water-road, "Lorelei" and "Waterspin" would have been aground more than once. Even that irresponsible head-among-the-stars Mariner guessed at the snares we avoided, and flung me a word of appreciation.

"You're earning your salt," said he, "and you shall have a little at Gouda."

But as to Gouda, a struggle was going on between my inclination and my conscience. It was my duty as skipper to take "Lorelei" through the town that she might be ready to start from the other side after luncheon. There would be delays at swing-bridges, and time would be lost if the party remained on board, and tried to see the place afterwards. If I trusted Hendrik to act as captain and chauffeur in one, something would go wrong, and I should be blamed. Nevertheless, I did not relish the thought of seeing Starr march off in

triumph with the ladies while I remained behind to work, and lunch on a cheese sandwich. I was tempted to shift responsibility upon Hendrik's shoulders to-day, and on other days to come; but as we slowed up for the sluice, or lock, something inside me would have no self-indulgence. To be sure, I am playing my part for a purpose, but while I play it, I must play well; and it was the conscientious captain who advised his passengers to get out, told them how to find the best inn, and what they were to see when they had lunched.

"The hotel is in the Markt Platz," I said, "and you must have a good look at the old Weigh House while you're on the spot. It will be your first Weigh House, and it's really a good one, with a splendid relief by Eggers, and a delightful outside staircase. Then there's the Stadhuis, too, and if you care for old stained glass, the work of the brothers Crabeth in the Groote Kerk —— "

"But aren't you going with us?" asked Miss Rivers.

I explained why I could not.

"Oh dear, and we can't speak Dutch!" she sighed. "Fancy a procession straggling through a strange town, wanting to know everything, and not able to utter a word."

"Nonsense, Phil, we can get on perfectly well," said Miss Van Buren, mutinous-eyed. "I've learned things out of the phrase-book. You can't expect a skipper to be a guide as well."

This was a stab, and I think it pleased her; but I laughed.

"I shall often be able to go with you, I hope, Miss Rivers," I said. "In many places the boat will start from the same spot where she gets in; then I shall be free and at your service."

I had to see them off without me, Miss Van Buren walking with Starr; and the only one who threw me a backward glance was Tibe. But the task I had before me was easier than I expected. There were fewer barges in waiting than on

most days. Here and there a tip to a bridge-master (a gulden stuck conspicuously in my eye, like a silver monocle, just long enough to suggest a different destination) worked wonders, and in an hour I had piloted "Lorelei" through the water-streets of Gouda, ready to take her passengers again on the Leiden side. Standing at the wheel, I had eaten a sandwich and drunk a glass of beer brought by Hendrik, so there was no need to seek food in the town. The others, having finished lunch, would have begun sight-seeing, and if I strolled to the Groote Kerk, it was just possible I might find something even more desirable than the exquisite glass.

"They'll have saved the church for the last," I said to myself. "I should like to see her face while she looks at the Haarlem window."

I could not have calculated more exactly, had we made an appointment. As I arrived within sight of the verger's door, I saw the party going in. There was a moment's pause, and then all save one disappeared. That figure was Starr's, and he was left in charge of the dog.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "you're just in time."

"Yes," said I. "Clever, wasn't I?"

"I mean in time to play with this brute, while I go in. He'll be pleased with the exchange; besides, you've seen the church and I haven't."

"I've never seen it in such companionship."

"Callous-hearted Albatross! You'll unconsecrate the church for Miss Van Buren. Can't you see she'll have none of you?"

"I shall need the more time to make her change her mind. Every minute counts. Au revoir. Don't let Tibe escape, or I pity you with your *aunt.*"

"I wish he'd jump into the nearest canal. Look here, Gouda's a fraud. We've had a loathsome lunch — cold ham and pappy bread — with paper napkins, and the whole meal served on one plate, by a female even my aunt was afraid

of. There isn't a cow within miles, much less a cow with a coat —— "

"Perhaps one may pass while you wait. Ta, ta. Your turn will come soon." And I left him glaring at Tibe and muttering threats of revenge against me.

All the windows of the Gouda church are beautiful, but the Haarlem window would warm the coldest heart, and I was not surprised to find Miss Van Buren already gazing at it, a lovely light streaming through the old glass upon her uplifted face. She is a girl to find out the best things at once, by instinct.

There she stood, lost in delight, and when I, assuming more boldness than I felt, walked quietly across the church and stopped close behind her, she threw just enough of a look at the new-comer to see that it was a tallish man in gray.

"Is that you, Mr. Starr?" she asked; but sure that no stranger would approach so near, and believing me at a safe distance, she took the answer for granted. "What a fairyland in glass there is in this church!" she went on, joyously. "What skies, and backgrounds of medieval castles and towers, and what luminous colors. I'd love to be one of those little red and yellow men looking out of the tower at the battle going on below, among the queer ships wallowing in the crisp waves, and live always in that fantastic glass country. I want to know what's inside the tower, don't you? Which man will you choose to be?"

"The one on your right side," said I, quietly.

Then she whisked round, and blushed with vexation.

"That you could *never* be," she flung at me, and walked away; but I followed.

"Won't you tell me why?" I asked. "What have I done to offend you?"

"If you don't know, I couldn't make you understand."

"Perhaps it's you who don't understand. But you will, some day."

"Oh, I've no curiosity."

"Am I spoiling your trip?"

"I'm not going to let you."

"Thanks. Then you'd better let me help to make it pleasanter. I can, in many ways."

"I don't need help in enjoying Holland. I intend to enjoy it every instant, in — in —— "

"Won't you finish?"

"In spite of you."

"I vow it shall be partly because of me."

"You're very fond of vowing."

Then, at last, I knew where I stood. I knew that Robert *had* said something.

Into the midst of this crisis dropped Miss Rivers. No doubt she had seen the expression on our faces, and intervened in pure good-heartedness to snatch me as a brand from the burning; for she threw herself into talk about the church, crying out against the hideous havoc we Protestants had wrought with whitewash and crude woodwork.

"I'm not Catholic, not a bit Catholic, though I may be a little high church; but I *couldn't* have spoiled everything just for the sake of getting a place to worship in, cheap, without having to put up a new building. Why, it's like *murder!*"

Then my lady flashed out at her unexpectedly, and saved me an answer.

"Where's your imagination, Phil? It must have gone woolgathering, or you could put yourself into the place of these people and see why they tore away the pictures and statues, and hid every bit of color with whitewash. I love beauty, but I would have done as they did. Color in churches was to them the life-blood of their nearest and dearest, splashed

upon the walls. Those statues, those pictured saints they pulled down or covered up, had smiled on persecution. They had to have a kind of frenzied house-cleaning to get out the smell of incense. Oh, I know how they felt when they did it, as if I'd been here myself with a broom full of whitewash."

"Perhaps some ancestress of yours was here, and did some sweeping," said I. But it was a mistake for me to speak. She froze in an instant, and suggested that if everybody had seen enough, we should go out and give "poor Mr. Starr a chance."

"I'll stop and show him the Haarlem window," said she. And I hated Starr. Perhaps that was the state of mind she wished to create; at all events her eyes retained the exaltation of the whitewashing. Nor should I wonder if those two enjoyed the thought that I was kept waiting outside, as much as they enjoyed roaming together in "glass country."

In any case, they stayed so long that we were able to visit a shop near by, and come back, before they reappeared. It was a nice shop, where sweets and cakes were sold, especially the rich treacle "cookies," for which Gouda is celebrated. There was much gold-bright brass; there were jars and boxes painted curiously; and we were served by an apple-cheeked old lady in a white cap, whom Miss Rivers and the Chaperon thought adorable. We bought *hopjes* as well as cookies, because they wanted to make acquaintance with the national sweets of Holland; and afterwards, when Miss Van Buren was given some, she pronounced them nothing but "the caramellest caramels" she had ever tasted.

She and Starr had developed a pleasant private understanding, which comprised jokes too subtle to be understood by outsiders; and as the Mariner and I were shoulder to shoulder for a moment on our way back to the boat, he gave me a look charged with meaning.

"Who laughs last, laughs best," he quoted; and inwardly I could not but agree, though I shrugged my shoulders.

Tibe attracted enormous attention in Gouda. As we walked along shady streets, lit by the clear shining of canals, children ran after us as at Hamlin they ran after the Pied Piper. If for one instant the strangers paused to study a beautiful, carved door, or to peer into the window of an antiquary's at blue and white jars, or to gaze up at the ferocious head of a Turk over a chemist's shop, or to laugh at a house with window-blinds painted in red and white diamonds, a crowd of flaxen heads collected round us, little hands fluttered over the dog's wrinkled head as butterflies flit about a clover blossom, baby laughter tinkled, and tiny shrieks cut the stillness of the sleepy, summer afternoon.

It was all so dream-like to Miss Van Buren that she declared incredulity in Holland's real existence. "There is no such country," she said, "and worse than all, I have no motor-boat."

Nevertheless, a shape which closely resembled "Lorelei" was floating like a white water-lily on a green calyx of canal, in the place where I had, or dreamed that I had, left her an hour ago. And having assembled on board that white apparition, we started, or dreamed that we started for Leiden — a place where I hoped to score a point or two with my lady.

The boisterous wind of the early morning had dropped at noon, leaving the day hot and unrefreshed, with no breath of air stirring. But on the water, traveling at eight or nine miles an hour, we forgot the heavy July heat which on shore had burned our faces. They were fanned by a constant breeze of our own making which tossed us a bouquet of perfume from flowery fields as we slipped by, the only sound in our ears the cry of sea-going gulls overhead, and the delicate fluting of the water as our bows shattered its crystals among pale, shimmery sedges and tall reeds.

Tiny canals of irrigation wandered like azure veins through

a maze of blossoming pink and gold in the sun-bright meadows, and as far as the most sweeping glance could reach, the horizon seemed pinned down to earth with windmills.

Suddenly the land lay far below the level of the canal, and people walking in the main streets of villages, behind the dykes, were visible for us only as far as their knees. Quaint little houses had sat themselves down close to the water's edge, as if determined to miss no detail of canal gossip; and from their bright windows, like brilliant eyes, they watched the water with a curious expression of self-satisfaction and contentment on their painted, wooden faces. On verandas, half as big as the houses themselves, the life of the family went on. Children played, young girls wrote letters to their lovers; mothers busily worked sewing-machines, but saw everything that passed on the water; fathers read newspapers, and white-haired old grandpapas nodded over long-stemmed pipes. Every garden blazed with color; and close-planted rows of trees, with their branches cut and trained (as Miss Van Buren said) "flat as trees for paper dolls," shaded the upper windows of the toy mansions.

Little things which were matters of every day for me in this country so characteristic of the Netherlands, tickled the fancy of the strangers, and kept them constantly exclaiming. The extravagantly polished wood of the house doors; the lifting cranes protruding from the gables; the dairymen in boats, with their shining pails; the bridges that pivoted round to let us pass through; the drawbridges that opened in the middle and swung up with leisured dignity; the bridgeman in sorrel-colored coats, collecting tolls in battered wooden shoes suspended from long lines; the dogs (which they call "Spitz" and are really Kees) who barked ferociously at our motor, from every barge and lighter; the yellow carts with black, bonnet-like hoods, from which peasant heads peered curiously out at us, from shore; and, above all, the old women or young

children with ropes across their breasts, straining to tow enormous barges like great dark, following whales.

"What can Dutchmen be like to let them do it, while they loaf on board?" Miss Van Buren flashed at me, as if I were responsible for the faults of all my male countrymen.

"It isn't exactly loafing to steer those big barges," said I. "And the whole family take turns, anywhere between the ages of ten and a hundred. They don't know what hard work it is, because nobody has told them, and our river people are among the most contented."

Starr was interested in seeing me salute the men of passing craft, and in their grave return of the courtesy. Soon, he could imitate my motion, though he exaggerated it slightly, letting his arm float gracefully out to full length before it came back to his cap, somewhat, as he remarked, "like a lily-stem blown by the wind." When he had got the knack he was enchanted, and every yacht, sail-boat, lighter, and barge had a theatrical greeting from him as it slipped silently past, perhaps never to be seen again by our eyes.

"But are they happy?" he asked. "You never hear bursts of laughter, or chattering of voices, as you would in other countries. The youngest children's faces are grave, while as for the men, they look as if they were paid so much a day not to shed a smile, and were mighty conscientious about earning their money. Yet you say they're contented."

"We Dutch are a reserved people," I explained, under Miss Van Buren's critical gaze. "We don't make much noise when we're glad, or sad; and it takes something funny to make us laugh. We don't do it to hear the sound of our own voices, but prefer to rest our features and our minds."

"Some of these bargemen look as if they'd rested their minds so much that vegetables had grown on them," mused Starr, which made Miss Van Buren giggle; and somehow I was angry with her for finding wit in his small sallies.

"You'll discover on this trip that as you treat the Dutch, so will they treat you," I went on. "If you're impatient, they'll be rude; if you show contempt, they'll pay you back in the same coin; but if you're polite and considerate there's nothing they won't do for you in their quiet way."

"We shall never be rude to any of them, shall we, Nell?" said Miss Rivers.

"Not unless they deserve it," came back the answer. And I knew what Dutchman in particular Miss Van Buren had in mind.

It was about two hours from Gouda when a blaze of color leaped from the distant level to our eyes, and everybody cried out in admiration for little Boskoop, which in summer is always *en fête* among garlands and bowers of bloom. The rhododendrons — that last longer with us than in England, like all other flowers — were beautiful with a middle-aged clinging to the glory of their youth; and the tall, straight flame of azaleas shot up from every grass-plot against a background of roses — roses white, and red, and amber; roses pale pink, and the crimson that is purple in shadow.

Miss Rivers thought she would like to live there, and cultivate flowers; but I told her that she had better not negotiate for the purchase of a house, until she had seen the miles of blossom at Haarlem.

We had not kept up our average of speed to nine miles an hour; for, though we made ten when the way was clear, and no yards of regulation red-tape to get tangled in our steering-gear, the custom of these waterways is to slow down near villages and in farming country. Besides, we met barges loaded to the water's edge, and had we been going fast our wash would have swamped them. As it was, we flung a wave over the low dykes, and sent boats moored at the foot of garden steps knocking against their landing-stages, in fear at our approach. But after Alphen we turned into a green stream,

so evidently not a canal that Aunt Fay was moved to ask questions.

Her face fell when she heard it was the Rhine.

"What, *this* the Rhine!" she echoed. "It's no wider than — than the Thames at Marlow. I was there last summer —— "

"You stayed with Lady Marchant," broke in Starr, hastily. It was not the first time he had cut her short, and the little masquerader bristled under the treatment.

"Oh yes; that was when you were painting my portrait, wasn't it?"

Starr flushed, and I guessed why, remembering his Salon success, and recalling that it was his portrait of Lady MacNairne which had been exhibited this year. Of course, I had been stupid not to put the two facts together, and realize that his success and her portrait, must have been one and the same.

The girls had probably heard of it, and must be asking themselves at this moment how a portrait of this little spectacled thing could have been possible. Cruel Aunt Fay! Somehow, she must have known that the face of her *alter ego* had been painted and exhibited by Starr, and she was enjoying his misery, as bad boys enjoy the wrigglings of butterflies on pins.

In pity I stepped in to the rescue, and began again, before a question about the portrait could fall from the lips of Miss Rivers, on which I saw it trembling.

"It's the Rhine for no particular reason," I said. "It's quite arbitrary. Farther on it's the Oude Rhine, farther still the Krommer, or Crooked Rhine. But if you think little of it here, you'll despise it at Katwyk, where it's end is so ignominious that it has to be pumped into the sea."

"I don't think that ignominious," said the Chaperon. "I suppose it doesn't choose to go into the sea. It would rather rest after its labors and lie down in a pleasant pool, to dream about where it rose on the Splugen, or about the way it poured out of Lake Constance, and went roaring over

the rocks at Schaffhausen to wind on among hilly vineyards and ruined castles, past the Drachenfels and Cologne. If they choose to pump it against its will, that's *their* affair; at least that's how *I* should feel if I were the Rhine."

"How Scotch of you, Aunt Fay!" exclaimed Starr, fervently; but he looked worried; and I wondered if he had told the girls that Lady MacNairne had never been much abroad. Evidently her double has traveled, and remembered what she saw. I am not curious concerning other people's affairs, but I confess I should like to know something of Aunt Fay's past, for she seems so ignorant of some things, so well-informed upon others.

Suddenly Miss Van Buren looked up from a red book which had engaged her attention ever since, at Alphen, we turned out of the narrow water-street of the canal into the broader thoroughfare of the river.

"This book explains everything except what you want to know!" she complained. "Why can't it tell what Saint Joris is in England? He must be some saint there, and I saw his name over that nice little inn with the garden at Alphen."

"St. George," I said; though she had not asked me.

"I might have known," she sighed, "and no doubt the Dutch have put the dragon into their language too, stuck full of those "i's" and "j's," that make me feel whenever I see them in print as if my hair were done up too tight, or my teeth were sizes too large for my mouth. 'Rijn wijn,' for instance. Who would think that meant something sleek and pleasant, like Rhine wine?"

"Why not?" I asked. "We pronounce it almost the same."

"That's because you haven't got the courage of your convictions. You fling the 'i's' and 'j's' about, and then pretend they're not there."

"Why, don't you see that they're only 'y's'?" I protested,

and really it does appear strange that to foreign eyes they can look, when side by side, like separate letters.

But the Chaperon stopped us. She said that we could find enough to do minding our p's and q's in life, without quarreling over "i's" and "j's"; so the argument ended, and the girls turned their attention to making tea.

They did it charmingly, juggling with the contents of a tea-basket which Starr brought on deck and placed on a little folding-table. Whether Miss Van Buren forgot me or not, in dealing out cups when tea was made, at all events she pretended to, and reminded by her stepsister, gave me tea without sugar. Then, begged for one lump, she absentmindedly dropped in three, while talking with Starr. Robert would certainly have been tempted to shake her if he had been present at that tea-party.

XII

MY mother sent me to Oxford, because she thought that she could take no intelligent interest in any young man if he had not had his four years at Oxford or Cambridge. But afterwards, through loyalty to my fatherland, I gave myself two at the University of Leiden; and as the rooms I lived in there hold memories of Oliver Goldsmith, I've kept them on ever since. I was twenty-four when I said good-by to Leiden, and for the five after-years the rooms have been lent to a cousin, studying for his degree as a learned doctor of law. Now, I knew it was close upon the time for him to take his degree, and I hoped that I might be able to show my friends (and one Enemy) a few things in my old University town which ordinary tourists might not see.

The tea-things had been washed up, and a discussion of plans (from which Miss Van Buren managed to exclude me) had ended in no definite conclusion, when I brought "Lorelei" into one of the innumerable green canals in Leiden.

"None of you seem to know what you want to do first, last, or in the middle," I ventured to remark; "so, to save time, perhaps you'll let me offer a few suggestions. I've told Hendrik to fetch a cab, and he's gone. When your carriage comes, engage rooms at the Levedag Hotel, drive through the town, have a glance at the churches, and go to the Stadhuis. You'll like the spire and the façade. They're both of the sixteenth century, when we were prosperous and artistic; and over the north-side entrance there's a chronogram inscription concerning the siege. I can't go, because I want to arrange

your evening, which I hope will be a success. But I'll meet you in the Archive Room at the Stadhuis, where you can admire the paneling till I come. I won't keep you waiting long; and then I'll take you over the University Buildings. I was there, you know, as a student."

By the time this plan was arranged to the satisfaction of everybody except that of the person I wished to please, Hendrik had arrived with a cab, and five minutes later I was free to carry out my scheme for the evening.

From Gouda I'd sent a wire to my cousin Jan van Hol, asking him to be at home and expecting me between four and five, so I felt sure of him. I took all the short cuts (which I know as well as I know my hat), and was soon climbing the ladder-like stairs of the old house, the top floor of which was home to me for two years.

From those windows Goldsmith looked down on the sleepy canal, when he visited a crony who was tenant of the rooms; and the door which Goldsmith's hand often touched was thrown open by the present tenant, who must have been listening for my step.

To my surprise, he was in wild *deshabille*, and far out of his usual phlegmatic self with excitement.

"It's my Promotie Day," he explained. "I'm just back and have got out of my swallow-tail after the final exam. I'm due at the Club for the first part of my dinner in a few minutes. Had you forgotten, or didn't you get your card?"

I told him that no doubt it was at Liliendaal, or wandering in search of me; and when I had slapped him on the back, and congratulated him as "Learned Doctor," I began to wonder what I should do, as it was clear he would have no time to help me carry out my plans. His Promotie dinner, the grandest affair of student life, and the rounding off of it, would be in three parts, with various ceremonies in between, and would last from now until two or three in the morning.

However, I told him what I had wanted; to give a surprise dinner at his diggings for the party from "Lorelei," with him to arrange details while I played guide, and to take the part of host for us at eight o'clock. Could he suggest any one who would look after the thing in his place? Van Rhonda or Douw, for instance? But van Rhonda and Douw, it seemed, were the Paranymphs, or supporters of the newly-made Doctor, and their time would be fully taken up in seeing him through. All my old friends who were left would be at the Promotie dinner, but Jan was sure that my business might be safely entrusted to the landlady. She would get flowers, go to the hotel to order whatever I wished, and even superintend the waiters.

With this I had to be satisfied, for in the midst of the discussion appeared the two Paranymphs, wanting to know what kept Jan, and the hero of the day was ruthlessly carried off between them. I had to do the best I could; my old landlady had not forgotten me, and I was assured that I might depend upon her. When I had scribbled a menu, consisting of some rather odd dishes, sketched an idea for the table decoration, and given a few other hasty instructions, I dashed off to keep my appointment at the Stadhuis. On the way I consoled myself with the reflection that it's an ill wind which blows nobody good. I had been bereaved of Jan as a prop, but I might make use of him and his friends by-and-by as one of the sights of Leiden, and I would take advantage of my knowledge of the usual program on such festive nights as this for the benefit of my friends.

I arrived at the Stadhuis as the others took their first look at the oak in the Archive Room. There was just one other room in this most excellent and historic building that I wanted Miss Van Buren to see. It was a Tapestry Room, among other Tapestry Rooms, of no importance; but I remembered her fantastic desire to "live in the stained-glass country," and

I recalled a certain tapestry garden in which I felt sure she would long to wander. There was a meal of some wonderful sort going on in it, and I had been conscious in other days of a desire to be a tapestry man and sit with the merry tapestry lady smiling there. All tapestry people look incredibly happy, for in tapestry etiquette it's bad form to be tragic. Even their battles are comedy battles, as you can see by the faces of the war-horses that they have a strong sense of humor; but these particular tapestry friends of mine were the gayest I ever met, and I wanted Miss Van Buren to make their acquaintance.

To reach the room, through another also representing a tapestry world, we had to perform a dreadful surgical operation on the abdomen of a Roman emperor by opening a door in the middle of it, and, as the Mariner said, the size of the next room gave the same sort of shock that Jonah must have had when he arrived in the whale.

If I had shown her that tapestry garden, Miss Van Buren would have feigned indifference; but I left her to Starr, and from a distance had the chastened pleasure of hearing her say to him the things I should have liked her to say to me.

Afterwards I swept the party away to the University, preparing their minds to expect no architectural splendors.

"Leiden is our most famous university," I said. "But we have no streets of beautiful old colleges, no lovely gardens. You see, Oxford and Cambridge are universities round which towns have gathered, whereas Leiden was a city long before William the Silent gave its people choice, as a reward for their heroic defense, of freedom from taxes or a university. When they said they'd have the university, the thing was to get it. Money wasn't plentiful, and here was an old monastery, empty and ready for use — a building whose simplicity would have appealed to William in his later days."

It was not until they had this apology well in their heads that I ushered them into the bare, red-brick courtyard so full

of memories for me, and here I buckled on my armor of defense.

"Our universities have produced great men, though they've given them no Gothic buildings or fairy gardens. Where will you find more illustrious names than Scaliger, Grotius, and Oliver Goldsmith? — lots of others, too. Why, Niebuhr said of our old hall that no place is so memorable in the history of science.

Trying to appear impressed, the three ladies, followed by Starr, trailed into the building, deserted at this hour; and it was the artist's quick eye that first caught the eccentric merit of the famous caricatures lining the staircase.

Then came the chamber of torture, the "Sweating Room," that bare, whitewashed cell remembered by all Leideners with anguish. There I (and thousands before and thousands after) had sat to wait my dreaded turn with the professors behind the green-baize table in the room next door. There I — among those other nerve-shattered ones — had scribbled my name and scrawled a sketch or two. "Here sweated Rudolph Brederode," read out Miss Rivers, with a sweet look, as if she pitied me now for what I suffered then. But Miss Van Buren showed sublime indifference. She wished, she said, to pick out names that were really interesting.

Even she, however, was roused to compassion for the tortured ones, when in the adjoining room she heard that the examinations were conducted publicly, and that there was no reason why any stranger should not walk in from the street to hear the victims put to the question.

"It's good for us," I said. "Helps us to pluck and self-control." But nobody agreed with me, and it was Miss Van Buren's opinion that none save Dutchmen would stand it.

The Senate Room, which Niebuhr wrote of, found favor in her eyes; but after that there was nothing more to do in the University, and it was only six o'clock. There were two hours

before the surprise dinner; so, without giving my secret away, I said that, if we put off dining until eight, we could see the Laeckenhalle, and go up to the Burg at sunset.

The Laeckenhalle and the Burg were mere names to them, as few scraps are thrown to either place by the guide-books; but so delighted were they with the carvings on the house of the Cloth Spinner's Guild and the marbles in the courtyard that I could hardly get them inside. Once within, Starr made Miss Van Buren laugh at the things she ought to have respected and linger before the things I hadn't intended to point out.

But I was not shocked at her flippant delight in a quaint representation of tortures in hell, nor was I stirred by her scorn of the stiff siege-pictures, with van der Werf offering his arm as food for the starving people, rather than surrender to the Spaniards. In spite of her distaste for the painting, however, she would not hear me decry van der Werf in favor of an obscure engineer, lately discovered as the true hero of the siege. Van der Werf should not be snatched from her by a man she chose to detest, so she argued and abused my treachery during the whole time spent among the relics of the siege. She glared at the saucepan retrieved from the Spanish camp as if she would have thrown it at my head. She thought me capable of denying authenticity to the blocks of taret-gnawed wood torn from the dykes when a worm made Holland tremble as Philip of Spain could never do; nor would she forgive me van der Werf, though I did my best with the tale of that time of fear when men, women, and children worked their fingers to the bone in restoring what the worm had destroyed, and keeping the sea from their doors.

I never yielded her a point, all the way up to the Burg, for at least I was cheating Starr of her. But in the fortress, on the ancient mound heaped up by Hengist, I and my opinions were forgotten. She wanted to be let alone, and pretend she was a woman of Leiden, looking out across the red roofs of the city,

through the pitiless red of the sunset, for the fleet of rescuing barges.

Nevertheless, she did deign to ask how, if the way had been opened for the sea to flood the land, the people coaxed it to go back again. And she looked at me as she had looked at Starr, while I told how the thing had been done; how the water that floated William's fleet for the relief of the town was but two feet in depth; how only a gale from the south at the right time sent the waters flowing from the broken dykes above Schiedam north as far as Leiden; and how no sooner was the city saved than the wind changed, calling back the waters.

From the walls of the fortress we saw the sun go down; and then, with Starr in the ascendant again, we strolled through quiet streets, crossing bridges over canals spread with soft green carpets of moss. But we were not going to the hotel; and without a word about dinner, I asked if they would care to see a student's "diggings." I had only to add as a bribe that Oliver Goldsmith had visited there and carved his initials in a heart on the wainscotting, to make them eager to climb the steep stairs which led to my Surprise.

It began by my opening the door at the top with a key—instead of knocking. This set them to wondering; but I laughed, evading questions, and lured them into an oak-walled room, dim with twilight.

According to instructions, no lamp or candle had been lighted, but a glance showed me a large screen wrapped round something in a corner, and I knew that I hadn't trusted good old Mevrow Hoogeboom in vain.

Now I struck a match from my own match-box, and as the flame flared up, success number one was scored. It was the old-fashioned Dutch lamp-lighter of brass, to which I touched the match, that called out the first note of admiration from the strangers; and as I woke up candle after candle, in its quaint

brass stick, the first notes rose to a chorus. What a lovely room! What walls, what dear old blue-and-white china beasts, what a wonderful fireplace, with handles to hold on by as you stood and warmed yourself! What chairs, what chests of drawers, what pewter tankards! If this were a typical room of a Leiden undergraduate, the Leiden undergraduates were lucky men.

I had to explain that it was hardly fair to call it typical; that only a man with money and a love for picking up old things would have quarters like these; still, the lodgings were typical of Leiden.

When the ladies had exhausted their adjectives, they grew curious concerning their host. I told them that the man was absent, because this happened to be the night of his Promotie dinner, but that I was free to do the honors.

"Well, I'm sick with envy of the fellow," said Starr, "and I for one daren't trust myself any longer, especially on an empty stomach, among his pewters and blue beasts and brasses. We'd better go away and have dinner."

"You needn't go away," said I, jerking an old-fashioned bell-rope, and drawing the screen aside. Behind it, was what I had hoped would be there — a table laid for five, with plenty of nice glass and silver, and banked with pink and white roses. As everybody exclaimed at the sight, an inner door opened and two waiters from the Levedag, who had been biding their time for my signal, appeared in answer to the bell.

"It's black magic," said Aunt Fay. "I believe these men are genii, and you've got the lamp in your pocket. How I *wish* I hadn't left Tibe at the hotel. He would have loved this, poor darling."

"Dinner is served, sir," announced one of the genii; and laughing, I offered the Chaperon my arm.

"But it *can't* be for us," objected Miss Rivers.

"It's for no one else," said I.

"It's black magic," said Aunt Fay

"How can we eat the man's things, when he's never seen us, and we've never seen him?" Miss Van Buren appealed to Starr. But it was I who answered.

"You see him now," I confessed. "These are my rooms. I lend them to my cousin, but I've kept the right to use them. As for the dinner, it's my dinner, and it will be a humiliation to me if you refuse to eat it."

These words were meant for her, and I looked straight at her as I spoke, so there could be no mistake. Red sprang to her cheeks. She bit her lip, and what she would have answered or done if left to herself I shall never know, for Miss Rivers slipped one arm coaxingly within the arm of her stepsister, and said, with a laugh, to make it seem that all three were jesting ——

"Why, of course she won't refuse. None of us would forgive her for spoiling our pleasure. Come along, Nell."

So Nell did "come along," like the sweet and sensible girl she really is, when she has not been driven to defiance by blundering young men; and we sat down to eat the best dinner that Leiden could provide at short notice. Nothing that was truly Dutch had been forgotten, but the most brilliant success was not the *plat* on which the *chef* would have staked his reputation. It was nothing more nor less than the dish with which all Leiden invariably occupies itself on the 3rd of October, anniversary of blessed memory. On that day it was, three hundred and thirty odd years ago, that a little boy ran joyously home from a flying visit to the deserted Spanish camp, with a pot of carrots and potatoes mixed together in a hotch-potch; therefore, with hotch-potch does Leiden to this hour celebrate the Great Relief, eating with thanksgiving.

And my guests ate with compliments, enjoying the idea if not the food, as if they had been Leideners. Last of all, we had grilled herrings with mustard, on toasted bread, a quaint

conceit which I had to explain by telling how, on the 3rd of October, bread and herrings are still distributed to the poor, because it was with herrings and bread that the Dutch boats, coming to the relief of Leiden, were loaded.

I managed to keep the party long at the table, and when the Chaperon proposed going, I looked at my watch, counseling patience for half an hour.

"If you'll wait," I said, "I'll show you something rather special on the way home — something that can't be seen by every one."

Then I told about my cousin; how this was his great day, and how, without being invited, we could share the fun. I told how, early this morning, Jan's Paranymphs had donned evening dress, according to old custom, and driven in smart carriages (the horses' heads nodding with plumes) to the railway station to meet their principal's father, mother, sisters, and pretty cousins; how the party had then come to these rooms, where Jan had received them, half shamefaced in his "swallow-tail"; how, not long before we arrived at the University, Jan had gone through his torture in the "sweating-room," and before the examiners with his relatives present; how the ladies, after seeing the town, had been ungallantly packed off home, before the best fun began. How Jan had returned, to cast away his evening things at the time when most people think of putting them on, and rush to the Students' Club in morning dress. How his Paranymphs and friends had met him, and at a big round table — soon to be covered with glasses — the Professors' servant (called "Pedel" of the University) had handed the new Doctor his official appointment, in return for a fee of ten gulden. How the dinner had begun in speech-making and music, with an adjournment after the first part, to the garden for coffee, liqueurs, and cigars; how, when the table had been cleared and rearranged, everybody had marched back to risk their lives by eating lobster and

quantities of indigestible things. How Jan would then have had to make his "palaver," thanking his friends for their speeches in his honor; and how, while he was speaking, the waiters would be placing a large napkin at the plate of each man — a mere napkin, but destined for an outlandish purpose. "By this time," I went on mysteriously, "those napkins are fulfilling their destiny, and if you would like to see what it is, you've only to follow me."

They were on their feet in an instant. We scrambled down the narrow stairs, and out into the starlit night. Leiden was a city of the dead. Not even a dog played sentinel for the sleeping townsfolk; not a cat sprang out of the shadows as I led my band through a labyrinth of canal-streets, floored as if with jet nailed down with stars. But suddenly the spell of silence was broken by an explosion of sound which crashed into it like breaking glass. A brassy blare of music that could not drown young men's laughter, burst on us so unexpectedly that the three ladies gave starts, and stifled cries. I stopped them at a corner, and we huddled into the shadow, flattened against a wall.

"The Napkins are coming!" I said, and I had not got the words out before the blue darkness was aflame with the red light of streaming torches, a wild light which matched the band music. There was a trampling of feet, and in the midst of smoke and ruddy flare sequined with flying sparks, came torch-bearers and musicians, led by one man of solemn countenance, holding in both hands a noble Nougat Tart — the historic, the indispensable Nougat Tart. Then, with a measured trot that swung and balanced with the music, followed the Napkins, wound turban-fashion round the heads of their wearers, and floating like white banners with the breeze of motion. First came a Paranymph thus adorned, then the learned Doctor holding fast to the leader's coat-tails; behind him the second Paranymph, and clinging to his coat the hero's

father, with the whole procession of turbaned friends tailing after.

They swept by us as a comet sweeps down the sky, and concerned themselves with our group against the wall no more than a comet does with such humble stars, dusting the outskirts of the Milky Way, as shrink from his fiery path.

"A vision of goblins," said the Mariner, when he had got his breath.

"What fun! But why do they do it?" asked Miss Rivers.

"Why? I'm sure I don't know," I laughed, "except because they always have, and I suppose always will, while there's a university at Leiden. That's all we'll see, but it isn't all there is to see. By-and-by the procession will go prancing back to the Club, where the next thing will be to get over the big reading-table, then over the buffet of the bar, without once breaking the chain of coat-tails, through passages and kitchens to the club-room once more, where the chain will be split up, but where the chairs in which the men will sit to drink champagne and eat the Nougat Tart, must be *on* the tables and not round them."

"And will that be the end?" inquired the Chaperon, who ever thirsts with ardor for information.

"Not nearly," said I. "The third part of dinner will be due, and every one's bound to eat it, even those whose chairs have fallen off from the pyramids of small tables, and whose heads or bones have suffered. They'll have dessert; and at dawn the best men will be taking a country drive."

"I begin to understand," said Starr, "how your people exhausted the Spaniards. Good heavens, you could wear out the Rock of Gibraltar! And I see why, though you can eat all day and all night too, you don't put on fat like your German cousins."

"When we begin a thing, we Dutchmen see it through," I replied modestly.

"So do we Americans," remarked Miss Van Buren.

"I wonder which would win if the two interests were opposed?" I hazarded, à propos of nothing — or of much.

"I should bet on America," said she.

"I *don't* bet," I returned, with all the emphasis I dared give; though perhaps it was not enough to tear up a deep-rooted impression; albeit the seed had been sown for but four-and-twenty hours.

So ended the lesson for the first day.

It was not an easy lesson for me. But I regret nothing.

XIII

"LOOK here," said the Mariner next morning, rapping on my door at the hotel, "how soon could we start for Katwyk?"

"I thought the expedition was given up," I answered, "as nobody spoke of it last night."

"Not in your presence, but my worthy aunt rejoices in a sitting-room, and we met there — some of us — to discuss the expedition. The girls *think* they're keen to go, but it's a case of hypnotism. *She* wants a thing, and in some curious way, known only to herself, she gives others the impression that they are wanting it frantically."

"I've noticed that," said I.

"Oh, you have? Well, she's a wonderful woman. I daren't dwell upon the things she's got out of me already, or ask myself what she'll get before the play's finished. That sitting-room, for instance. I suppose it will end in her always having one. Did you observe Tibe's collar? It cost twenty-five dollars, and the queer part is that I *offered* it to her. I thought at the time I wanted him to have it. Now, I ask you, as man to man, is it *canny*? And she has a traveling-bag with gold fittings. I presented it under the delusion that I owed it to her as my — temporary relative. Heavens, where is this to end? Not at Katwyk, with the Rhine. But we've got to go there. Anything to please her."

Strange to say, the hypnotic influence must have stolen up from her ladyship's room on the floor below, and along the corridor to mine, for I found myself thinking: "She rather likes me, and can be useful, if she dominates the

two girls in this way. I must do my best to keep her on my side."

No doubt this was the form the influence took, but I made no struggle against it. On the contrary, I assured Starr that the expedition to Katwyk would be a good expedition; that I would be dressed in ten minutes; that I didn't mind about breakfast, but would have a cup of coffee with Hendrik; that if the party came on board "Lorelei" in half an hour, they would find her ready.

"All right, I'll tell them," said he. "I did want to stop and see a few pictures, for it seems a burning shame to leave the town where Gerard Douw, and Steen, and lots of other splendid chaps were born, without worshiping at their shrines, but —— "

"They're rather bare shrines at Leiden," I consoled him. "You've seen much better specimens of their work elsewhere. You'd be disappointed."

"Just as well to think so. I'll give your message; but as there are three ladies and one dog, you'd better expect us when you see us."

In spite of this fact I had little time to spare, though it appeared that *en route* to the boat a delay was caused by Tibe jumping into a cab with two elderly ladies from Boston, who, so far from reciprocating his overtures, nearly swooned with terror, and had to be soothed and sustained by the entire party.

The canal that leads from Leiden to Katwyk-aan-Zee passes the houses of Descartes and Spinoza; and altogether the short journey by water did not lack interest, for Katwyk has become a colony of artists. Once there, we walked to the sluice where the Rhine seeks its grave in the North Sea; and as it happened that the tide was high, with a strong shore wind, I could show the Cyclopean defenses of our coast at heir best. With the secret pleasure which I believe all men

take in pointing out things to women, I explained the great series of gates through which the river passes to its death. All were closed against the raging waves, which leaped and bellowed, demanding entrance, rearing their fierce heads twelve feet or more above the level where the Rhine lay dying. When the tide should turn, and the wild water retreat, the sluice-gates would be opened, and the river would pour seaward, sweeping away the masses of sand piled up in fury by the cheated waves.

We lunched on board the "Lorelei," I munching abjectly on deck, on duty at the wheel, while from the cabin below came to my ears the tinkling of girls' laughter, and the merry popping of corks. In theory I was better off than Tantalus, for Tantalus had no beer or sandwiches; but, on the other hand Tantalus was not in love with a girl whose voice he could hear mingling with his rival's; so practically there was not much to choose.

Luckily I had not to bear the strain for long. I did my best yesterday, in talking of Haarlem, to awaken interest in the huge Haarlemmer-meer Polder, and its importance in the modern scheme of the Netherlands. Now my eloquence was rewarded, for they hurried through their luncheon, not that they might cheer the skipper's loneliness, but that they might miss no feature in the landscape.

We were skirting one side of the green plain which has been reclaimed from the water, converting the meer into a "polder." Our canal flowed many feet above the level of the surrounding land, so that we looked down upon men tilling, upon white-sailed boats cutting through miniature waterways as if they navigated meadows, and upon cows grazing knee-deep in mist, which rose like blowing silver spray, over the pale-green waves of grass.

These black-and-white cattle, according to Miss Van Buren, form the upper circles of the cow-world in Holland.

Not only do they live up to their traditions by being cleaner and sleeker than the cows of other countries, but they know themselves to be better connected than the mere red-and-white creatures with whom they are occasionally forced to share a meadow. To show that they understand what is due to their dignity, they refuse to talk with the common herd, and stand with their backs to any red-and-white nonentity that may presume to graze near, conversing among themselves in refined monotones with the air of saying, "Who *was* she?"

There's little in the history of the Netherlands which Miss Van Buren does not know, for she is proud of her Dutch blood, though she won't say so before me. The others are frankly ignorant; but the Chaperon has read a book of Rider Haggard's called "Lysbeth," and was deeply interested in the Haarlemmer-meer, where the "treasure" of that story lay hid; but it was news to her that the great inland sea had once sent a destructive flood to the gates of Amsterdam, and that as punishment it had been drained away. Miss Van Buren — whom I think of as "Nell" — knew all this, including the very day in 1840 when the work was begun, and how many months the pumps had taken to drink the monstrous cup dry; but the mysterious little lady who rules us all, and is ruled by Tibe, expected to find the Haarlemmer-meer still a lake, and was disappointed to learn the meaning of "polder." She thought thirty-nine months too long for draining it, and was sure that in America (where she quickly added that she had "once been") they would have done the work in half the time.

Every one fell in love with the outskirts of Haarlem, as "Lorelei" swam into the River Spaarne. Though the glory of the tulips was extinguished (like fairy-lamps at dawn) three months ago, the flowers of summer blazed in their stead, a brilliant mosaic of jewels.

"The Dutch don't seem a nation to have gone mad over a tulip; but perhaps they were different in the seventeenth

century," said Miss Rivers, looking at me, as if I stood to represent my people.

"And the English don't seem the kind to have lost their heads over a South Sea Bubble, but they did," retorted Nell, as if she were defending us.

They liked the houses along the river-side, houses big and little, which look as if the front and back walls of their lower stories had been knocked out, and the space filled in with glass. They were amused by the rounded awnings over the balconies, which Nell likened to the covers of giant babies' perambulators; and they laughed at the black-painted doors picked out with lines of pale green, which contrasted with a whitewashed façade.

At Haarlem I had another surprise for them, which I arranged before leaving Rotterdam. It was one which would cost nothing in trouble, little enough in money, and would give pleasure to everybody — except to my chauffeur, who is in love with my mother's French maid, and no doubt was reveling in the thought of a long holiday at Liliendaal.

When I'd brought "Lorelei" through the bridge, and hove her to by the broad quay, there stood close at hand a handsome, dark-blue motor-car.

"What a beauty!" exclaimed Nell. "That's much grander than Robert's." Then she glanced at me. "I beg your pardon," said she, demurely. "I'm afraid the car my cousin has is yours."

"So is this," said I.

"Dear me, what is I doing here?" she demanded, sorry to have praised a possession of the enemy's.

"It's waiting to take you round Haarlem," I replied. "I thought it would be a nice way for you to see the place, as the suburbs are its speciality, so to speak, and motoring saves time."

"You're a queer chap, Alb," remarked the Mariner. "You

have such a way of keeping things up your sleeve, and springing them on one. You ought to be called 'William the Silent.'"

"Why, that's what he is called, didn't you know? Mr. van Buren told us," exclaimed Phyllis, and ended up her sentence with a stifled shriek which could have meant nothing but a surreptitious pinch.

I would not have glanced at either of the girls for anything; but I would have given something to know how Nell was looking.

"Have you any more belongings here?" asked the Chaperon, gaily. "Such as an ancestral castle, where you could give us another surprise feast?"

I laughed. "As a matter of fact, I have an ancestral castle in the neighborhood. It isn't mine, but it was my ancestors', and if I can't exactly entertain you in it, I can give you tea close by at a country inn. Perhaps you've read about the Château of Brederode, within a drive of Haarlem?"

I saw by Nell's face that she had, but she was the only one who did not answer, and the others hadn't informed themselves of its existence.

Hendrik, helped by my chauffeur, got out the small luggage which is kept ready for shore duty — the Chaperon's splendidly-fitted dressing-bag making everything else look shabby — and the five of us (six with Tibe) got into the car, I taking the driver's seat.

The streets of Haarlem being too good to slight, I drove leisurely toward the heart of the old town, meaning to engage rooms and leave all belongings at the quaint Hotel Funckler, which I thought they would like better than any other; but passing the cathedral, Miss Phyllis begged to stop, and I slowed down the car. After Gouda's wonderful glass, they would have found the Haarlem church disappointing, had it not been for the two or three redeeming features left in the cold, bare structure; the beautiful screen of open brass-work,

with its base of dark wood, on which brightly-painted, mystic beasts disport themselves among the coats-of-arms of divers ancient towns; and the carved choir-stalls.

Nell and the Mariner were so fascinated by a wooden gentleman wearing his head upside down, and a curiously mixed animal carrying its offspring in a cloak, that I found time to send secretly for the organist; and before my friends knew what was happening, the cold white cathedral was warmed and lighted too, by such thrilling music as few organs and few organists can make.

When it was over, and only fleeting echoes left, Miss Rivers came and thanked me.

"That was your thought, of course," said she. "None of us will ever forget."

My chauffeur had kept Tibe, and when we reappeared, was surprised in the act of fitting a pair of spare goggles on to the dog. Aunt Fay was delighted with the effect, and a photograph was taken before we were allowed to start, though time was beginning to be an object. But, as the Chaperon cheerfully remarked, "Tibe and tide wait for no man."

"What does 'groote oppruiming' mean, written up everywhere in the shops?" she inquired eagerly, as the car flashed through street after street.

I told her that in a Dutch town it was equivalent to the "summer sales" in London, and she seemed satisfied, though I doubt if she knows more of London than of Rotterdam. But she and the girls wanted everything that they saw in the show windows, and I found that, before we left Haarlem, the Mariner's purse would again be opened wide by the hypnotic spell of Aunt Fay.

In a thirty horse-power car we were not long on the way out to Brederode, though I took her slowly through the charming Bloemendaal district, giving the strangers plenty of time to admire the quaintly built, flower-draped country houses half

drowned in the splendid forest where Druids worshiped once, and to find out for themselves that the dark yellow billows in the background were dunes hiding the sea.

We left the car in front of the shady inn, and ordered coffee to be ready when we should come back — coffee, with plenty of cream, and a kind of sugared cake, which has been loved by Haarlemers since the days when the poor, deluded ladies of the town baked their best dainties for the Spaniards who planned their murder.

It was natural to play guide on the way to the dear old copper and purple and green-gold ruin, ivy-curtained from the tower roofs to the mossy moat.

This was my first visit to the place for a year or two, and I longed to take the One Girl apart, to tell her of my fantastic ancestor, the Water Beggar, of whom I am proud despite his faults and eccentricities; to recall stories of the past; the origin of our name "Brede Rode," broad rood; how it, and the lands, were given as a reward, and many other things. But instead, I made myself agreeable to the Chaperon, and saved Tibe on three separate occasions from joining the bright reflections and the water-lilies in the pond.

I sat by Nell at a table afterwards, however, and she had to pour coffee for me, because she was doing that kind office for the rest; and as the sugar tongs had been forgotten, she popped me in a lump of sugar with her own fingers before she stopped to think. Then, she looked as if she would have liked to fish it out again, but, being softer than her heart, it had melted, and I got it in spite of her.

We drove back through the forest in a green, translucent glimmer, like light under the sea, and there was little time to dress for dinner when I brought them to anchor for the night. The nice old hotel, with its Delft plates half covering the walls, its alcoves and unexpected stairways with green balusters, and its old dining-room looking on a prim garden,

pleased the eyes which find all things in Hollow Land interesting.

It was a long dinner, with many courses, such as Dutchmen love; still, when we finished, daylight lingered. In the fantastic square with its crowding varieties of capricious Dutch architecture, the cathedral was cut black and sharp out of a sky of beaten gold, and Coster's statue wore a glittering halo. Under their archways of green, the canals were on fire with sunset, their flames quenched in the thick moss which clothed their walls; the red-brown color of paved streets, and the houses with their pointed façades in many steps, burned also, as if they were made of rose-and-purple porphyry instead of common bricks, while each pane of each window blazed like a separate gem.

It was a good ending to a good day, and though I had accomplished nothing definite, I was happy.

Next morning I had the car ready early, and took every one for a spin through the Hout, which reminded them of the Bois, or what the Bois would be if pretty houses were scattered over it like fallen leaves.

We stopped in Haarlem after that last spin only long enough to do reverence to Franz Hals, and the collection of his work which is the immediate jewel of the city's soul.

It was pretty to watch Nell scraping acquaintance with the bold, good-humored officers and archers, and bland municipal magnates whom Hals has made to live on canvas. She looked the big, stalwart fellows in the eye, but half shyly, as a girl regards a man to whom she thinks, yet is not quite sure, she ought to bow.

"Why, their faces are familiar. I seem to have known them," I heard her murmur, and ventured an explanation of the mystery, over her shoulder.

"You do know them," I said. "Their eyes are using the eyes of their descendants for windows, every day in the streets. Holland isn't making new types."

We stopped at Haarlem only long enough to do reverence to Franz Hals

She turned to look me up and down, with a flicker of long lashes. Then she sighed ——

"What a pity!"

Perhaps I deserved it, for I had brought it on myself. Nevertheless, sweet Phyllis pitied me.

"What surprise have you got for us next, Sir Skipper?" she asked brightly. "Mr. Starr says that no day will be complete without a surprise from you; and we depend upon you for our route as part of the surprise."

"I thought Mr. Starr was making out our route," remarked Nell to a tall archer of Franz Hals.

"If I've contrived to create that impression, I've been clever," said the Mariner. "In fact, I would have preferred you to think me responsible, as long as the route proved satisfactory. Of course, whenever anything went wrong, I should have casually let drop that it was Alb's idea. But, as you mention the subject in his presence, I must admit that he has made several suggestions, and I've humored him by adopting them, subject to your approval.

"Does the name of Aalsmeer convey anything to your minds?" I asked. But all shook their heads except Nell, who appeared absorbed in making a spy-glass of her hand, through which to gaze at her jolly archer.

"Then it shall be this day's surprise," I said. "I won't tell you anything; but you needn't be ashamed of ignorance, for all the world is in the same boat, and you won't find Aalsmeer in guide-books. Yet there isn't a place in the Netherlands prettier or more Dutch."

"Good-by, Franz Hals, perhaps forever. We leave you to seek pastures new," said Starr. "Come along, Miss Van Buren."

So she came, and I drove them in the car to the quay, where I directed my chauffeur to go on to Amsterdam, and be ready to report for order at the harbor of the Sailing and Rowing Club.

XIV

THERE is nothing remarkable in the broad canal that connects Haarlem with Amsterdam, and when we had started, Miss Van Buren read aloud to the assembled party. Her book was Motley, and the subject that siege which, though it ended in tragic failure, makes as fine music in history as the siege of Leiden. Meanwhile, as she read, we skimmed through the bright water, which tinkled like shattered crystals as we broke its clear mirror with our prow.

There were few houses along shore, but far in the distance, seen across wide, flat expanses, shadow villages and tapering spires were painted in violet on the horizon — such a shimmering horizon as we of the lowlands love, and yearn for when we sojourn in mountain lands. At Halfweg, a little cluster of humble dwellings, I turned out of the main canal, skirting the side of the Haarlemmer-meer Polder, opposite to that which we had followed yesterday.

"When is the surprise coming?" asked Phyllis at last, her curiosity piqued by the slowness of progress in this small canal.

"Now," said I, smiling, as I stopped at an insignificant landing-place; "this is where we go on shore to find it."

"Methinks, Alb, you are playiug us false," said the Mariner. "You're about to lead us into a trap of dulness."

"I've a mind to stop on board and finish the chapter," said Nell.

"You'll repent it if you do," I ventured. Yet I think she would have stayed if her stepsister had not urged.

We walked along an ordinary village street for some distance; it was dusty and unbeautiful. Even Miss Rivers had begun to look doubtful, when suddenly we came in sight of a toy fairyland — a Dutch fairyland, yet a place to excite the wonder even of a Dutchman used to living half in, half out of water.

From where the party stopped, arrested by the curious vision, stretched away, as far as eyes could follow, an earthern dyke, bordered on either hand by a lily-fringed toy canal, just wide enough for a toy rowboat to pass. Beyond the twin, toy canals — again on either hand — was set a row of toy houses, each standing in a little square of radiant garden, which was repeated upside down in the sky-blue water, not only of the twin canals, but of the still more tiny, subsidiary canals which flowed round the flowery squares, cutting each off from its fellow.

Tibe, delighted with Aalsmeer and a dog he saw in the distance, darted along the straight, level stretch of dyke, which every now and then heaved itself up into a camel-backed bridge, under which toy boats could pass from the right-hand water-street to the left-hand water-street. We followed, but on the first bridge Nell stopped impulsively.

"Do you know we've *all* been in this place before? It's *Willow-pattern-land. Don't* you recognize it?"

"Of course," the Mariner assured her. "You and I used to play here together when we were children. You remember that blue boat of ours? And see, there's our house — the pink one, with the green-and-white-lozenge shutters, and the thicket of hydrangeas reflected in the water. Isn't it good to come back to our own?"

Thus he snatched her from me, just as my surprise was succeeding, and made a place for himself with her, in my toy fairyland.

"It's true! One does feel like one of the little blue people

that live in a willow-pattern plate," said Phyllis, as Nell and Starr sauntered on ahead. "It's perfectly Chinese here, but so cozy; I believe you had the place made a few minutes ago, to please us, and as soon as we turn our backs it will disappear. It *can't* be real."

"Those men think it's real," said I. There were several, rowing along the canals in brightly painted boats, with brass milk cans, and knife-grinding apparatus, calmly unaware that they or their surroundings were out of the common. Each house on its square island having its own swing-bridge of planks, the men on the water had to push each bridge out of the way as they reached it; but the trick was done with the nose of the boat, and cost no trouble. Most of the toy bridges swung back into place when the boats passed, but the one nearest us remained open, and as we looked, walking on slowly, two tiny children returning from school, clattered toward us in wooden sabots, along the narrow dyke. Opposite the disarranged bridge they stopped, looking wistfully across at a green-and-blue house, standing in a grove of pink-and-yellow roses, shaded with ruddy copper beeches, and delicate white trees like young girls trooping to their first communion.

Evidently this was the children's home, but they found themselves shut off from it; and standing hand-in-hand, with their book-bags tossed over their shoulders, they uttered a short, wailing cry. As if in answer to an accustomed signal, a pink-cheeked girl who, of course, had been cleaning something, came to the rescue, mop in hand. She touched the bridge with her foot; the bridge swung into place; without a word the dolls crossed, and were swallowed up in a narrow, sky-blue corridor.

We wandered on, turning our heads from one side to the other, I reveling in the delight of the others. Though Aalsmeer is but a stone's throw from Amsterdam, it seems as far out of the world as if, to get to it, you had jumped off the

earth into some obscurely twinkling star, where people, things, and customs were completely different from those on our planet.

If there had been only one of the queer island-houses to see, it would have been worth a journey; but each one we came to, in its double street of glass, seemed more quaint than that we left behind. Some were painted green or blue, with white rosettes, like the sugar ornaments on children's birthday cakes. Some were so curtained with roses, wistaria, or purple clematis, that it was difficult to spy out the color underneath. Some were half hidden behind tall hedges of double hollyhocks, like crisp bunches of pink and golden crêpe; others had triumphal arches of crimson fuchsias; but best of all the island shows were the dwarf box-trees, cut in every imaginable shape. There were thrones, and chairs, and giant vases; harps and violins; and a menagerie of animals which seemed to have come under a spell and been turned into leafage in the act of jumping, flying, and hopping. There were lions, swans, dragons, giraffes, parrots, eagles, cats, together in a happy family of foliage; and when I told the Chaperon that the people of Aalsmeer were garden-artists, as well as market-gardeners, she insisted on stopping. Nothing would satisfy her but the Mariner must cross the bridge, knock at the door of a little red house, and buy a box-tree baby elephant, which she thought would be enchanting in a pot, as a kind of figurehead on board "Waterspin."

Nor was I allowed to remain idle. When I had helped him bargain for the leafy beast, I had to go down on my knees, roll up my sleeves, and claw water-lilies out from the canal, which they fringed in luscious clusters. This I did while men and maids in painted boats heaped with rubies piled on emeralds (which were strawberries in beds of their own leaves) laughed at me. Boat peddlers came and went, too, with stores of shining tin, or blue, brown, and green pottery that glittered

in the afternoon sun. Some of them helped me, some jeered in Dutch at "these foreigners with their childish ways."

In the end I was luckier than Starr, for he had to march under the weight of his green elephant, half hidden behind it, as behind a screen, while my lilies were so popular with the ladies that not even as a favor would I have been allowed to carry one. All three, if left to themselves, would have lingered for hours, choosing which house they would live in, or watching families of ducks, or counting strewn flowers floating down the blue water as stars float down the sky.

"I believe, Nephew, that I must ask you to buy me a house in Aalsmeer to come and play dolls in," announced Aunt Fay. "Don't you suppose, Jonkheer, that one could be got cheap? — not that *that* need be a consideration to dear Ronny!"

"I'll find out — later," I assured her, answering a despairing look of Starr's from between the green tusks of his elephant.

"Oh, please, *now*," urged the gentle voice which every one but Tibe obeys; "because, you know, I'm not strong, and when I set my heart on a thing, and suffer disappointment, it makes me ill. If I were ill I should have to go home, and those darling girls couldn't finish the trip."

"You haven't had time to set your heart upon a house here," said Starr. "You only thought of it a minute ago."

"We Scotch have so *much* heart, dearest, that it goes out to things — and people — in less than a minute. I'm a victim to mine. It would be a pity —— "

"Oh, do go to the head fairy at once, Alb, and demand a cheap house for my aunt to play dolls in," groaned Starr. "If he hasn't got one, he must build it."

"He could easily do that," said I. "Every now and then a new island is formed in this water-world, and the nearest householder seizes it, claiming it as his own, on much the

same basis that Napoleon claimed the Netherlands. Then he digs it into an extra garden or strawberry bed. But he would sacrifice his vegetables if he saw a prospect of making money. It might amuse Lady MacNairne to do a little amateur market gardening, though they say slugs are unusually fat and juicy in Aalsmeer."

"Oh! Maybe I'd better wait and see a few more places before I decide, then," exclaimed the lady. "Not that I'm afraid of slugs myself, only I'm sure they wouldn't agree with Tibe. And besides, it would be dull for him in winter."

"Not at all," said I, having discovered that the one possible way of detaching the lady from a pet scheme is by advising her to cling to it. "Everybody skates then, instead of going about in boats, and no one has really seen Aalsmeer who hasn't seen it on a winter evening. Then, in front of each island, on a low square post, is set a lighted lantern. Imagine the effect of a double line of such lights all the way down the long, long canal, each calling up a ghost-light from under the blue ice."

The tyrant shivered. "It sounds lovely," she said; "but I think I *will* wait. Come, girls, we'd better be getting back to the boat."

"Sweet are the uses of an Albatross," I heard Starr murmur.

We turned our backs on the water fairies' domain, and went into the world again. In the long commonplace street of shops through which we had passed in coming, Aunt Fay stopped. She had torn a silk flounce on her petticoat, and would thank me to act as interpreter in buying a box of safety-pins. I made the demand, and could not see why the two girls and their chaperon had to stifle laughter when an earnest, flaxen-haired maiden began industriously to count the pins in the box.

"She says she has to do that, because they are sold by the piece," I explained; but they laughed a great deal more.

It was a pity they could not see the meer which rings in their fairyland — a meer dotted with high-standing, prim little islands, which, though made by nature, not man, have much the same effect, on a larger scale, as the clipped box-trees on show in the gardens. But to have taken "Lorelei" that way would have made it too late for a visit to Zaandam; and I thought Zaandam, despite its miles of windmills and the boasted hut of Peter the Great, not worth a separate expedition. So I turned back to Halfweg, and from there slid into a side canal which bore us toward that immense waterway cut for great ships — the North Sea Canal. There was a smell of salt in the air, and a heavy perfume from slow-going peat-boats. Gulls wheeled over "Lorelei" so low that we could have reached up and caught their dangling coral feet. A passing cloud veiled the sun with gray tissue which streaked the water with purple shadow, and freckled it with rain. Passengers on Amsterdam-bound ships that loomed above us like leviathans, stared down at our little craft and the bluff-browed barge we towed. Here we were in the full stream of sea-going traffic and commerce; and afar off a mass of towers showed where Amsterdam toiled and made merry.

But we were not yet bound for Amsterdam. Twisting northward as the details of the city were sketched upon the sky, we turned into the canal which leads to Zaandam of the self-satisfied, painted houses. There was just time for a swift run down the river, and a call at one of that famous battalion of windmills whose whirling sails fill the air with a ceaseless whirr, like the flight of birds at sunset; then a walk to the hovel where Peter the Great lived and learned to be a shipwright. But when they had seen it, the ladies would not allow it to be called by so mean a name.

"What a shame they found out who he was so soon!" said Nell. "And he had to leave this dear little bandbox to go back to a mere every-day palace. *I* wouldn't have been driven

away by a curious crowd. I should just have marched through with my nose in the air."

"His nose wasn't of that kind," said I. "I suppose he's the earliest martyr to notoriety on record. But perhaps he had learned all he wanted to know; and I'm not sure he was sorry to go back to his palace, which, judging by all accounts, wasn't a grand one in those days. You'll see finer houses even in Amsterdam."

And an hour later she was seeing them.

XV

AMSTERDAM was in full glory that evening, in the strange radiance that shines for her, as for Venice, when red wine of sunset and purple wine of night mingle together in the gold cup of the west.

At such a time she is a second Venice, not because she is built upon piles and stands upon many islands linked by intricate bridges, but because of her glow and dazzle, her myriad lights breaking suddenly through falling dusk, to splash the rose and violet of the clouds with gilded flecks, and drop silver into glimmering canals, as if there were some festive illumination; because of her huge, colorful buildings, and her old, old houses bowing and bending backward and forward to whisper into each other's windows across the darkness of narrow streets and burning lines of water.

The fierce traffic of the day was over, but the dam roared and rumbled, in vast confusion, with its enormous structures black against the moldering ashes of sunset.

"A cathedral without a tower; a palace without a king; a bishop's house without a bishop; a girl without a lover," is the saying that Amsterdammers have about the dam; and I repeated it as we drove through, while my friends searched the verification of the saw. All was plain enough, except the "girl without a lover"; but when they learned that she was a stone girl on a pedestal too constricted for two figures they pronounced her part of the distich far-fetched.

Undaunted by all they had done that day, they would go out again after dinner, when Amsterdam was blue and silver and shining steel in the quiet streets, with a flare of yellow

light in the lively ones, where people crowded the roadways, listening to the crash of huge hand-organs, or shopping until ten o'clock.

We supped at the biggest *café* in Europe; and then for contrast, since we were in a city of contrasts, I took them to the quaintest inn of Amsterdam — a queer little pointed-roofed house hiding the painted "Wilderman" over his low-roofed door, behind a big archway, in the midst of all that is most modern, but with an interior of a rich gold-brown gloom, lit by glints of brass and gleams of pewter which would have delighted Rembrandt.

Next day it was to his house, in the strange, teeming Jewish quarter that we went first of all; but Nell and Phyllis were heartsick to find the rooms, once rich in treasures, piled untidily with "curiosities" of no great beauty or value.

Then, by way of a change after the Old Town, and the harbor with its queer houses, like drunken men trying to prop each other up, I chose the Heerengracht, all the city has of the richest and most exclusive. But the tall mansions, with their air of reserve and their selfishly hidden gardens, struck the eye coldly; and not even my tales of tapestry, lace, old silver, and, above all, Persian carpets, to be seen behind the veiled windows, could arouse the ladies' curiosity. It was well enough to have built Amsterdam in concentric crescents, with the Heerengracht in the center, and to say arbitrarily that the further you went outwards, the further you descended in the social scale. That distinction might do for the townspeople; as for them, they would rather live in a black and brown house in the Keizergracht, with a crane and pulley in one of the gables, and white frames on the windows, than in this dull street of wealth and fashion.

"Even half a house, with a whole door of my own, like most middle-class Dutch houses, would be nicer," said Nell.

"Yes, I could be happy in 'a *boven huis*,' with my little stairway and hall quite to myself."

But when I had shown her my favorite bit of Amsterdam, she became unfaithful to the Keizergracht, and its picturesque fellows.

To reach this bit, we turned from the roar of a noisy street, and were at once in the calm of a monastic cloister.

It was like opening a door in the twentieth century, and falling down a step into the seventeenth, to find Time lying enchanted in a spell of magic sleep.

What we saw was a spacious quadrangle with an old-fashioned, flowery garden in the midst, and ranged round it pretty little houses, each one a gem of individuality. There was a church, too, a charming, forgotten-looking church; and in the quadrangle nothing stirred but gleams of light on polished windows and birds which hopped about on the pavement as if it had been made for them.

"I believe they're the inhabitants of the place, who've hurriedly changed into birds just while we are here, but will change back into little, trim old ladies and old gentlemen," whispered Nell; for it seemed sacrilege to break the silence.

With that, a house door opened, and just such an old lady as she described came out.

"Oh, she didn't know we were here. She won't have time to get into her birdhood now," chuckled Nell, "so she's making the best of it. But see, she's turned to warn her husband."

"She hasn't any husband," said I.

"How can you tell?" asked the girl.

"If she had, she couldn't live here," I explained, "because this is the Begynenhof, half almshouse, half nunnery, which has been kept up since our great year, 1574. But oddly enough the chapel of the sisterhood who established it, has been turned into an English church. Queer, in the little Catholic village hidden away from the great city; but so it is. And isn't it a serene spot?"

"Almost nicer than Aalsmeer," murmured the Chaperon. "I wonder if —— "

But Starr was at the door of the exit before she could finish wondering.

The palace, more suitable for a magnificent town hall than a regal dwelling, was the next violent contrast in my bag of colors; but, royal though it was, there was nothing in it they cared for much except the throne-room, which they had to admit was not to be surpassed. There were a few mantelpieces too, which the Chaperon thought she would accept from the Queen as presents; but as for the carpets, they were no less than tragic, and it would be better to go about opening bridges, or laying dull cornerstones, then stay at home and look at them.

My way of showing Amsterdam was to work slowly up to a grand crescendo effect; and the crescendo was the Ryks Museum. We had two days of Amsterdam (the second was mostly spent at the diamond cutters') before I suggested the museum.

Aunt Fay said, when I did, that she hated such places. They gave her a headache, a heartache, and a bad cold. But she did not hate the Ryks Museum, and delighted the Mariner by picking out the best Rembrandts. After our first day at the museum (which we gave to the pictures) she could have had anything she asked from her dearest Ronny.

Then there were the Dutch rooms, and the rooms where the wax people live. I did not speak of the wax people until the ladies were tired, therefore they were cold to the idea of wax figures, even when they heard that the Queen had been five or six times to see them.

"Perhaps she never saw Madame Tussaud's," remarked Miss Rivers, in a superior, British way; but the magic word was spoken when I said that the wax people wore every variety of costume to be found in Holland, and I was ordered to conduct the party to them at once.

Instantly they felt the alarming fascination of the wax faces, whose hard eyes say, "At night we live, and walk about as you are doing now": and at the closing hour Aunt Fay and the two girls had to be forcibly torn away.

"Is it possible that some day we shall see live people dressed as those wax people are?" she exclaimed.

"You will see them by the hundred," I answered.

She paused a moment. "Miss Van Buren wants to know if one can buy any special costume to which one takes a fancy."

"Yes, if one doesn't mind what one pays," I answered; "but I was nettled that the girl could not have asked so simple a question herself. This is not the first time she has employed a go-between, to find out something which I alone know, and doubtless there will be more occasions, if I let things go on as they are going now. But I don't mean to let them go on. What I shall do, I haven't made up my mind; yet some step must be taken, if I am to reap anything from this trip except a harvest of snubbings.

It was only a little thing that she should question me through her chaperon, regarding the costumes; but it was one more straw in a rapidly growing bundle. And on the way back to the hotel from the museum she pretended not to hear when I spoke. She discussed with Starr, and not with me, the splendors and the crudities of Amsterdam, and asked if he didn't detect here and there a likeness to some old bit of New York — "New Amsterdam." Of course he agreed; and they talked of the "Dutchness" of Poughkeepsie and Albany, and Hudson, and many other places which I never heard of. No wonder that there was triumph in the glance he threw me. Alb (he was thinking, no doubt) was not getting much fun for his money. And it was true. Nevertheless, Alb was not discouraged. He was making up his mind that the time for quiet patience was over, as the skipper of "Lorelei" had engaged for something better.

XVI

"BY Jove, here's a lark!" exclaimed Starr, at the breakfast table, looking up from the Paris *Herald*.

It was at the Amstel Hotel, on our fourth morning, and he and I were taking coffee together, as an Ancient Mariner and his Albatross should. The ladies had not yet appeared, for they were breakfasting in their rooms.

"What's up?" I asked.

"It's under the latest news of your Queen's doings," said he, and began to read aloud: " 'Jonkheer Brederode, who is equally popular in English and Dutch society and sporting circles, has taken for the season a large motor-boat, in which he is touring the waterways of Holland, with a party of invited friends, among whom is Lady MacNairne. It was her portrait, as everybody knows, painted by the clever American artist, Mr. R. L. Starr, which was so much admired at the Paris Salon this spring.' Funny, how they strung that story together, isn't it? But it's a bore — er — in the circumstances, their having got hold of my aunt's name."

"People who weave tangled webs mustn't be surprised if they get caught in them sometimes," said I.

"I wonder how Miss Van Buren will like this? She's sure to see it," Starr went on, reflectively.

How she liked it mattered more to me than to anybody else, because if she disliked it, I was the person upon whom her vexation would be visited. But there was a still more important point which apparently hadn't come under the Mariner's consideration. How would Lady MacNairne's husband like it?

Evidently Starr doesn't know that there has been an upset of some sort between Sir Alec and the charming Fleda; and as Fleda is his aunt, bu: has not confided in her nephew (while she has in me) no matter what trouble the newspaper paragraph may cause for the entire party, it would be a breach of confidence for me to enlighten him.

"By Jove," I said to myself, "what will MacNairne do if he sees in the paper that his wife, who has run away from home without telling him where she's staying, is the principal guest on board a boat of mine? I ought to warn Starr that there may be a crash, but I can't."

The only thing I could do was to pump him, in the hope that he knew more of his aunt's affairs than I supposed.

"My stock's pretty far down in the market with Miss Van Buren already," said I. "It can't go lower. I wonder how these asses think of such nonsense? But I suppose it came of registering 'Lorelei' in my name, which I had to do, to use the flag of the Sailing and Rowing Club of Rotterdam. Somebody heard of the boat's being registered by Rudolph Brederode, and *voila* the consequences. But where *is* Lady MacNairne?"

"Heavens, don't yell at the top of your voice," groaned Starr, in a dreadful whisper. "There may be some one at the next table who can speak English. I've had an awful lesson, as nobody knows better than you, to behave in a restaurant as if I were at church. The real Lady McN., who is *not* up-stairs at the present moment breakfasting with Tibe, may be in Kamschatka for all I know, though I think it probable she's not. All I *do* know is that she's never answered two frantic telegrams of mine. She's not at home. She may be anywhere else — except in Holland, where she's wanted."

"It would be awkward if she should turn up now," I remarked.

"*Was* wanted, I ought to have said. But she's such a good pal, I should fix things up with her somehow."

"I doubt if you would with her husband," I thought, though aloud I said nothing. I was sure now that he was in ignorance of the situation, blissful ignorance, since he could not guess what developments it might lead to for him, and for the Chaperon whom he had provided at such cost.

"If anything happens, I shall have to help him through it somehow," I decided, "as it's more than half my fault, registering 'Lorelei' in my name. Besides, I can't let the party be broken up, until I've had a fair chance to raise Brederode stock in the market."

To know that at any moment Sir Alec MacNairne might pounce upon us, denounce the Chaperon as a fraud, disgust the girls with Starr, and put a sudden end to the adventure as far as the two men in it were concerned, was not conducive to appetite. I forgot whether I had just begun my breakfast, or just finished it, but in either case it interested me no more than eggs and toast would have interested Damocles at the moment of discovering the sword.

"The principal thing is not to let the girls see the *Herald*," said Starr.

I wished it were the principal thing; still, I said nothing, and getting up, we went into the hall.

"Miss Van Buren would think it cool of you, perhaps, if she knew you'd registered her boat in your name," said Starr, taking up the subject again. "She wouldn't understand —— "

"*What* would Miss Van Buren think cool?" asked Miss Van Buren's voice behind us, and the Mariner started as if we were conspirators.

"Oh, nothing particular," he answered limply.

"Please tell me."

"I'll tell you," I said, with a sudden determination that she should know the worst, and do her worst, and be conquered by something stronger than her prejudice. The tug-of-war

was coming between us now, that tug-of-war I had been expecting and almost desiring.

"I registered your boat in my name," I said calmly, "and Starr thinks you wouldn't understand."

She threw up her head, flushing. "I *don't* understand."

"It gives us the right to use the flag of my club."

"We could have got on without it."

"Often with grave inconvenience."

"I would have risked that."

"Forgive me, but amateurs are always ready to take risks."

(At this moment I became aware that Starr had slipped away.)

"Isn't it rather late," she flashed at me, "to ask my forgiveness for — *anything?*"

"It was a mere civility," I answered with equal insolence. "I've done nothing for which I've felt the need of your forgiveness, Miss Van Buren; but if you think I have, pray tell me once for all what it was, that I may defend myself."

"You don't feel," she echoed, "that *you've done anything for which you need my forgiveness?* Oh, then you're more hardened than I thought. I hoped that by this time you were repenting."

"Repenting of what?"

"Of everything. Of — putting yourself in your present position, among other things."

"You mean in the position of your skipper? I may say, that if I haven't repented, it isn't your fault. But, really, I've been so busy trying to make myself useful to the party in more ways than one, that I've had no time for repentance."

"Oh, you have made yourself useful," she had the grace to admit. "If — it hadn't been for the *beginning*, I — I should have been grateful. You know things which none of the rest of us know. You've shown us sights which without you we should never have seen or heard of. But as it is, how can I, why

should I, be grateful? It's only for the sake of the others, and their pleasure, that I —— "

"So you said before," I broke in. "But now I refuse to accept toleration from you — we won't say consideration, for that's too warm a word — for the sake of others. The boat is yours. I am your skipper. If, after serving you as well as I could for a week, you wish me to go, I will go."

She stood and stared at me from under lashes meant only for sweet looks.

"You will go?"

"Certainly. This moment. I only wait your word." I heard myself saying it; and in a way I was sincere, though I was the same man who, only a few minutes since, had vowed to do anything rather than let the trip end. Of course I would have to go now, if she told me to go. But I knew that I should not go. As skipper, I was her servant, if she chose to give me the name; but as a man I felt myself her master.

"I — I — " she faltered, and I saw her throat flutter. "You're putting me in a horrid position. We — I thought we'd settled this matter, things being as they are."

"Not at all," said I. "Nothing was settled."

"You're Mr. Starr's friend, and I can't send you away."

"You can, easily," I replied. "And since that appears to be your only reason for not doing so, I'll not wait for your orders to go. Good-by, Miss Van Buren, I'll do my best to get you another skipper, a professional this time."

I moved a step away, and my blood was beating fast. Everything depended on the next instant.

"Stop! Please stop," she said.

I stopped, and looked at her coldly.

For a moment we stood regarding each other in silence, for it seemed that, having detained me, she could think of nothing more to say. But suddenly she broke out, with a fierce little stamp of the foot.

"*Oh!* Sometimes I can understand why it was that Philip *liked* to torture the Dutch."

It was all I could do not to burst out laughing. But it would have spoiled everything for me if I had laughed.

"You have tortured the Dutch," said I. "But now it's finished. The Dutch have tired of the torture."

"Oh, you're tired? Then you had *better* go, I suppose. Why are you waiting?"

"You stopped me for something. What was it?"

"I—hardly know. It was only—I was going to propose——"

"You were going to propose?"

"That — you stayed a little longer. You were to take us — them, I mean — on an excursion to-day in your motor-car. They're getting ready now. They'll be — *so* disappointed."

"I'll lend you — them — my car and my chauffeur."

"No, it would be horrid without y — It would be too ungracious. I — they — couldn't accept."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't you think maybe you'd better stay a little longer?"

"No, Miss Van Buren, I go now, or I — go with you to the end." I wonder if she guessed just what I meant by those words? "I'll not stop, after what's passed between us, for a day longer, except on two conditions."

"Conditions? *You* make conditions with me?"

"Certainly, I have the right."

"You are extraordinary."

"I am a Dutchman."

"Oh, here comes Lady MacNairne — in her motor-coat and hood. She bought them yesterday — because they're Tibe-color. What excuse can I make? Oh, what *are* your conditions?"

"First, that you tell me you want me to stay."

"I do — on their account."

"That's not the way."

"Well, then, I ask you to stay. I hope your next condition isn't as hard."

"You must be the judge. It is, that you'll be civil to me, and friendly — at least in appearance. I have done, and will do my best for you and 'Lorelei.' In return, I'll have no more snubs."

"But if they've been deserved? No! I won't be browbeaten."

"Nor will I. Good-by, again, Miss Van Buren."

"Here comes Phil now, in *her* motoring things. Oh dear! Have it as you like. I will — be nice to you."

She smiled in spite of herself, or else to encourage me with a sample of future treatment; and giving way to impulse at last, I held out my hand.

"Shake hands on the bargain, then, and it's signed and sealed," I said.

She laid her fingers delicately in mine, and dared not look resentful when I gently pressed them.

For all I cared, she might see the Paris *Herald* now. For all I cared, the sky might fall.

dreamed of danger, we swung out on the road to Laren, a road set in pineland and heather, which would have reminded the real Lady MacNairne of her Scottish home. There was actually something like a hill here and there, which the strangers were astonished to find in Holland, and would hardly believe when I said that, on reaching Gelderland, I would be able to show them a Dutch mountain two hundred feet high, among a colony of smaller eminences to which half the Netherlands rush in summer.

Meanwhile they were satisfied with what they saw; and it is a pretty enough road, this way between Amsterdam and Laren. At first we had had the canal, with its sleepy barges, peopled with large families, and towed by children harnessed in tandem at the end of long ropes; its little shady, red-and-green wayside houses, with "Melk Salon" printed attractively over their doors. We had had avenues of trees, knotted here and there into groves; we had passed pretty farmhouses with bright milk-cans and pans hanging on the red walls, like placks in a drawing-room; we had seen gardens flooded with roses, and long stretches of water carpeted with lilies white and yellow; then we had come to pine forests and heather, and always we had had the good klinker which, though not as velvety for motoring as asphalt, is free from dust even in dry weather. We had run almost continuously on our fourth speed; and even in Laren I came down to the second only long enough to let them all see the beauty of the Mauve country.

Starr knows Anton Mauve's pictures, and his history; but the ladies had seen only a few delicious landscapes in the Ryks Museum. Still, they liked to hear that at Laren Corot's great disciple had found inspiration. Nowhere in the Netherlands are there such beautiful barns, each one of which is a background for a Nativity picture; and it was Laren peasants, Laren cows, and the sunlit and cloud-shadowed meadows of Laren which kept Mauve's brush busy for years.

It was ten o'clock when I got them all — including Tibe — into the car; indeed, it always seems to be exactly ten o'clock when we start on any excursion, even when it has been decided over night that we should set off promptly at nine. But Starr, who pretends to knowledge of women's ways, says we are lucky to get away anywhere before eleven, seeing that at the last moment one of the ladies remembers that she must write and post an important letter, which will take only five minutes; or she finds she has forgotten her purse in a drawer at the hotel, and must go back; or she thinks she will be too cool or too hot, and must make some change in her costume; or if nothing of this sort happens, Tibe is lost sight of for a second, and disappears in pursuit of new friendships, canine or human. He has then not only to be retrieved, which is usually an affair of twenty minutes, but has to be caressed for an extra five by his mistress, who never fails to abandon hope of seeing him again the moment he is out of sight.

To test the quality of Miss Van Buren's resolutions, I asked her to take the seat beside the driver, expecting some excuse; but she came like a lamb; and the taste of conquest was sweet in my mouth.

In Haarlem all had proved such good motorists that, despite the ferocity of Amsterdam trams, I was scarcely prepared for the emotions which began to seethe in the *tonneau* the moment the car was started and the chauffeur had sprung to his place at my feet. According to my idea, there's no courage in reckless driving, but selfishness and other less agreeable qualities; still, we did not exactly dawdle as we left the Amstel, to swing out into the tide of city life.

"Heavens, he's going to kill us!" I heard the Chaperon groan. "Ronald, tell him to stop."

Miss Rivers was also giving vent to despairing murmurs. Tibe was "wuffing" full-noted threats at each tram which loomed toward us, and Starr was attempting to advise me over

my shoulder that the ladies would wish to be driven less furiously.

To my joy, Nell looked back and laughed. "Why, we're not going more than seven miles an hour," said she.

"Then, for goodness' sake, let's go *one*," implored her chaperon. "I never dreamed of anything so awful."

I slackened pace. "Are you an old motorist?" I inquired of my companion, as if I were used to asking her friendly, commonplace questions.

"I never was in a car until the other day with my cousin," said she, in the same carefully unconscious tone. "And I'm afraid in my feet and hands now; but the rest of me is enjoying it awfully. Yes, that's the word, I think, for it *is* rather awful. I shouldn't have dreamed that trams could look so big, or bridges so narrow, except in nightmares. And — and you can't make your horn heard *much*, can you, over the noise on the stones? Oh, there was a close shave with that wagon, wasn't it? I felt bristling like a fretful porcupine — oh, but a stark, staring mad, blithering, *driveling* porcupine!"

It was delicious to have her talk to me, and to feel that because she trusted my skill, she was not really afraid, but only excited enough to forget her stiffness.

"Perhaps Amsterdam wouldn't be a pleasant place to learn 'chauffeuring' in," I said; "but it's all right when you have learned."

"It's a good thing," she went on, "that motoring wasn't invented by some grand seignor in the Middle Ages, when the rich thought no more of the poor than we do of flies, or they'd have run over every one who didn't get out of their way on the instant. They'd have had a sort of cow-catcher fitted on to their cars, to keep themselves from coming to harm, and they'd have dashed people aside, anyhow. In these days, no matter how hard your heart may be, you have to sacrifice your inclinations more of less to decency. I dare say the Car of Jug-

gernaut was a motor. Oh, what a *huge* town! Shall we ever get out of Pandemonium into the country?"

We did get out at last, and suddenly, for in Hollow Land the line between town and country is abrupt, with no fading of city into suburb and meadow. One moment we were in the bustle of Amsterdam; the next, we were running along a klinker road, straight as a ruler, beside a quiet canal. Such horses as we met, being accustomed to the traffic of Amsterdam, had no fear of the motor, which was well; for on so narrow a road, with the canal on one side, and a deep drop into meadows on the other, an adventure would be disagreeable. But it was not all straight sailing ahead. Outside the traffic, I put on speed to make up for lost time, and the car quickly ate up the distance between Amsterdam and Muiden.

My passengers broke into admiration of the medieval fortress with its paraphernalia of moats, bastions, and drawbridges, which give an air of historic romance to the country round; but their emotion would have been of a different kind had they guessed the risk we must take in running through the winding fortifications. It was not so great a risk that it was foolish to take it, and thirty or forty cars must do the same thing every day; but the fact was, that we had to run through these tunnels on tram-lines, with no room to turn out in case of meeting a steam monster from Hilversum. I had chosen my time, knowing the hours for trams; still, had there been a delay, there was a chance of a crash, for our horn could not be heard by the tram driver, nor could he see us in time to put on his brakes and prevent a collision.

With the girl I love beside me, and three other passengers, not to mention the chauffeur, it was with a tenseness of the nerves that I drove through the labyrinth, and I was glad to clear Muiden. Next came Naarden — that tragic Naarden whose capture and sack by the Spaniards encouraged Alva to attack Haarlem; and then, without one of the party having

dreamed of danger, we swung out on the road to Laren, a road set in pineland and heather, which would have reminded the real Lady MacNairne of her Scottish home. There was actually something like a hill here and there, which the strangers were astonished to find in Holland, and would hardly believe when I said that, on reaching Gelderland, I would be able to show them a Dutch mountain two hundred feet high, among a colony of smaller eminences to which half the Netherlands rush in summer.

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After the charm of Haarlem's suburbs, Hilversum, where merchants of Amsterdam play at being in the country, was disappointing; but having lunched in open air, and spun on toward Amersfoort, we ran into a district which holds some delightful houses, set among plane trees, varied with flowering acacias and plantations of oak. Everywhere our eyes followed long avenues cut in the forest, avenues stretching out like the rays of a star, and full of a tremulous green light, shot with gold.

In the midst of this forest we came upon Soestdyk, where the Queen-Mother lives, that pleasant palace with its romance of a mysterious, secret room; then by-and-by we ran into Amersfoort, ringed by its park, and Nell was so entranced with the Gothic church tower, that she rejoiced to hear it was the finest in the northern Netherlands.

I had chosen market-day in Amersfoort for our drive, and as we sailed into the spacious square of the town, my passengers saw in one moment more Dutch costumes than in all their previous days in Hollow Land.

It was too late for the best of the picture; still, the market-place glittered with gold and silver helmets, and delicate spiral head-ornaments. Ear-rings flashed in the sun, and massive gold brooches and buckles. There was a moving rainbow of color and a clatter of sabots, as the market women packed up their wares; but there was no time to linger, if we were to reach Spaakenberg before the shadows grew long. We sped on, until the next toll-gate (we had come to so many that Nell said our progress was made by tolling, rather than tooling along the roads) where a nice apple-cheeked old lady shook her white cap at the motor, while accepting my pennies. It was her opinion, though she was not sure, that the road — oh, a very bad road! — to Spaakenberg, was now forbidden to automobiles.

To tell the truth, I had never motored to Spaakenberg, but

I had bicycled, and thought there ought to be room on the narrow road for two vehicles, even if one were a motor and the other a hay-cart.

I was not surprised that the old lady had no certainty with which to back up her opinion. It was more surprising that she should know of the existence of Spaakenberg, of which many Dutch bicyclists who pride themselves on their knowledge, have never heard.

Naturally we determined to persevere, more than ever eager for a sight of the strange fishing-village, and a glimpse of the Zuider Zee.

"But what shall we do if we find the road forbidden, and we're too far off to walk?" Nell asked. "It would be dreadful to turn back."

"We shan't turn back," said I. "We'll hire a wagon and go on, or — we'll pass the sign which forbids us to proceed, too quickly to see it. Such things happen; and the road's too narrow to turn or even to reverse."

"I am glad you're a Dutchman," said she.

"Why? Because I know the ropes?"

"No. Because you'd die rather than give up anything you've set out to do."

It was now as if the apple-cheeked old prophetess had bewitched the country. The monarchs of the forest fled away and left us in the open, with a narrow strip of road between a canal loaded with water-lilies and low-lying meadows of yellow grain.

The landscape was charming, and the air balmy with summer; but with the first horse we met all peace was over.

Here were no longer the *blasé* beasts of a sophisticated world. Animals of this region had never seen a town larger than Amersfoort. A motor-car was to them as horrifying an object as a lion escaping from his cage at a circus.

Horses reared, hay-carts swayed, peasants shrieked maledic-

A couple of great yellow dogs, drawing a cart, swore canine oaths against the car

tions or shook fists; but always, crawling at snail's pace, we managed to scrape past without accident. Sometimes we frightened cows; and a couple of great yellow dogs, drawing a cart which contained two peasant girls in costume, swore canine oaths against the car.

"Oh, mercy, we've just passed a sign in Dutch, 'Motors forbidden'!" cried Nell.

"Well, we've passed it," said I. "Perhaps it meant that side road; it's narrower than ours. Let's think it did."

So we gave it the benefit of the doubt and fled on, until in less than an hour we flashed into a fishing-village. They all cried, "Spaakenberg and the Zuider Zee!" But as it was not Spaakenberg, I gave them only a flashing glimpse of masts and dark blue water.

Half a mile's drive along a canal, and we came to our destination. And of Spaakenberg the first thing we saw was a forest of masts, with nets like sails, brown, yet transparent as spider-webs. Fifty sturdy fishing-boats were grouped together in a basin of quiet water within sight of the Zuider Zee, which calls to men on every clear night, "the fish are waiting."

I stopped; and as we counted the boats, the whole able-bodied population of Spaakenberg issued from small, peak-roofed houses to see what monster made so odd a noise. By twenties and by thirties they came, wonderful figures, and the air rang with the music of sabots on klinker.

There were young women carrying tiny round babies; there were old women who had all they could do to carry themselves; there were little girls gravely knitting their brothers' stockings; and toddling creatures so infinitesimal that one could not guess whether they would grow up male or female. There were men, too, but not many young ones; and there were plenty of chubby-faced boys.

As for the women and girls, they wore Heaven knows how many petticoats — seven or eight at the minimum — and

their figures went out at the places where they should have gone in, and went in at the places where they should have gone out. They were like the old-fashioned ladies with panniers on each side; and those who could not afford enough petticoats had padded out their own and their children's hips to supply the right effect.

Some had black hoods with furry rolls round their rose-and-snow faces; some heightened the brilliancy of their complexion by close-fitting caps of white lace, according to their religion — whether they were of the Catholic or Protestant faith; and the babies, in black hoods, neck-handkerchiefs, and balloon-like black skirts reaching to their feet, were the quaintest figures of all. The men and boys, in their indigo blouses, were not living pictures like their female relatives, save when, with bright blue yokes over their shoulders (from which swung green, scarlet-lined pails, foaming with yellow cream), they returned from milking blue-coated, black and white cows.

Unspoiled by the influx of strangers, the simple people thronged round us, not for what they might get, but for what they could see. We were quainter to them than they to us, and Tibe was as rare as a dragon. His mistress was of opinion that they believed the noise of the motor (now stilled) to have issued from his black velvet muzzle; and when we all, including the tragic-faced, happy-hearted bulldog, got out to wander past the rows of tiny houses in the village, they swarmed round him, buzzed round him, whirled round him, to his confusion.

Escape seemed hopeless, when Nell and Phyllis had an inspiration. They rushed in at the door of a miniature shop, with a few picture postcards and sweets in glass jars displayed in a dark window. Three minutes later they fought their way out through the crowd of strange dolls "come alive," and, like a farmer sowing seed, strewed pink and white lozenges over the heads of girls and boys.

Instantly the "clang of the wooden shoon" ceased. Down

squatted the children with the suddenness of collapsed umbrellas. There was a scramble, and we seized the opportunity for flight. We had seen the Zuider Zee; we had seen the cows in blue coats; we had seen Spaakenberg; and Spaakenberg had seen us.

XVIII

RETURNING by way of wooded Baarn, we spun back to Amsterdam when violet shadows lengthened over golden meadows, and gauzy mist-clouds floated above the canal, burnished to silver by the sunset.

It was too late to do anything but dine and plan for tomorrow, which I had mapped out in my mind, subject to approval. But I let them all talk, as I often do, without saying anything until they turn to me with a question.

"There's an island which people say is wonderful, and you mustn't miss it," remarked the Chaperon. "But I've forgotten the name."

"Why is it wonderful?" asked Miss Rivers.

"I can't remember. But there was something different about it from what you can see anywhere else."

"Dear me, how awkward. How *are* you to find it?" sighed Phyllis.

"Ask Alb to rapidly mention all islands in Holland, and perhaps it will come back to you," suggested the Mariner. "Begin with A, Alb."

"Not worth while wasting the letters of the alphabet," said I. "Lady MacNairne (the name invariably sticks in my throat) means Marken."

"*That's* it!" exclaimed the Chaperon. "How could you guess?"

"There's only one island that people talk about like that," I replied. "It's the great show place; and it's like going to the theater. The curtain rings up when the audience arrives, and rings down when it departs. You'll see tc-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"My idea was to take you there to-morrow, unless you prefer another place."

I looked at the mistress of the boat, and no hardness came into her eyes. The contrast between her manner yesterday and her manner since this morning was so marked that, instead of being wholly pleased, I was half alarmed. It seemed too good to be true that her feelings should have changed, and that the sun should continue to shine.

"Why, certainly, let's go to Marken," she said. "I was thinking of Broek-in-Waterland, as I read it was near, and the sweetest place in Holland; however, we can go by-and-by, if ——"

"But my plan includes Broek-in-Waterland, gives you a glimpse of Monnikendam, takes you to Marken, and winds up at Volendam, beloved of artists," said I. "I don't believe we'll find it easy to tear Starr from Volendam."

So it was settled, and every one agreed to be ready at ten o'clock next morning. But ten o'clock came, and no Nell, no Phyllis, no Chaperon.

My car was at the door, as I intended to save time by motoring to the Club harbor, where the yacht was lying; and when Starr and I had waited in the hall for some minutes, Aunt Fay appeared.

"Haven't the girls come in yet with Tibe?" she asked. There was a note of anxiety in her voice, though, owing to the fact that the blue spectacles are very large, the wings of gray hair droop very low, a perky bow of white gauzy stuff worn under the chin comes up very high, and the face is very small, it is difficult to tell by the lady's expression what she may be feeling; indeed, there is remarkably little room for an expression to be revealed; which adds to the mystery of the Chaperon's personality.

"Are they out?" asked Starr.

"Yes. But they promised to be back at a quarter to ten, without fail, or I shouldn't have let them go. Tibe's had no breakfast, and he *must* have his teeth brushed before we start. Oh dear, I'm afraid something's happened."

"For goodness' sake, don't be excited. You get such an American accent when you're excited," whispered the Mariner, fiercely. "Be brave. Remember you're a Scotswoman."

"If I lose Tibe, I shall be a madwoman," she retorted.

"You won't lose him. Alb and I care at least as much for the girls as you do for your dog, and we're not worrying ——"

"That's different. The girls don't belong to you," almost wept the tiny creature. "You haven't fed them, and brushed them, and washed their feet every day of their lives since they were a few months old, as I have with Tibe, and if you're not *very* nice to me, you never will."

"We never dared hope for quite as much as that," said Starr, "but we *are* being nice to you. What do you want us to do? They're half an hour behind time. Shall we give an order for the Town Crier? I dare say there's one in use still, as this is Holland."

"If you're sarcastic, Ronald, I'll *leave* you the moment I have my darling Tibe again," replied the Chaperon, and the threat reduced Ronald to crushed silence.

"What took them out so early in the morning?" I asked.

"Oh, Tibe escaped from my room for a minute, and was eating a boot which he found at somebody's door — a horrid, elastic-sided boot: I'm sure it couldn't have been good for him — and the two girls brought him back. They were going out for one last glimpse of that quaint, hidden square you call 'the village,' which they longed to see again, and they asked if they should take Tibe, so I said yes, as he's fond of driving.

"Oh, they were driving?" said I.

"Yes. They could easily have been in long ago. There *must* have been an accident. Miss Rivers is always so de-

pressingly prompt. Such a strange girl! She considers it quite a sin to break a promise, even to a man, and she seems actually to *like* telling the truth."

We soothed the Chaperon's fears as well as we could; but when half-past ten came, and there were still no signs of the missing ones, we both began to be troubled.

"If they don't appear in ten minutes, I'll drive slowly in the direction by which they should return," I said; but the words had hardly left my lips when the girls walked into the hall, with Tibe. Both charming faces were flushed, and it was evident that something exciting had happened. But whatever it was, nobody was the worse for it. Tibe flew to his mistress, knocking down a child, and almost upsetting an old gentleman by darting unexpectedly between his legs, while the girls rushed into explanations.

"We're so sorry to have kept you waiting, but we've had *such* an adventure!" cried Nell. "We were driving back from the 'village,' when Tibe gave a leap and jumped out of the cab before we could hold him."

"We were *terrified,*" broke in Phyllis.

"And he disappeared in the most horribly mysterious way," finished Nell.

"We thought some one in the crowd must have stolen him, so we stopped the cab ——"

"And began tearing about looking for him, asking every human being in every known language *except* Dutch, if they'd seen a dog, or a *chien*, or a *hund* ——"

"But nobody understood, so we went into a lot of shops, and he wasn't in any of them ——"

"And we were in *despair*. We shouldn't have *dared* come back without him ——"

"I should think not!" cut in the Chaperon.

"And we were on the way to the nearest police-station, with a dear old gentleman who could speak English, and a

whole procession of extraneous creatures who couldn't, when we saw Tibe, calmly driving in a carriage with ——"

"A strange man, and ——"

"He never so much as looked at us, but we were *sure* we couldn't be mistaken, at least Nell was: so we deserted our old gentleman, and began running after Tibe's carriage, shrieking for it to stop."

"Naturally, every one thought we were mad; but we didn't care, and at last the man in the carriage realized we were after him. If he *hadn't* stopped, we should have known that he'd deliberately stolen Tibe; but he did stop, and we said, both together, it was our dog."

"The man took off his hat, and answered in English, such a nice man, and quite good-looking, with a big mustache, and quick-tempered blue eyes. He said that the first thing he knew, Tibe had jumped into his cab, and he had no idea where he came from, as he'd been reading in a guide-book; but the strangest thing was, he left certain Tibe had belonged to *him* when a puppy; only his dog wasn't named Tibe, but John Bull — Bully for short, and he sold him to an American, because it turned out his wife didn't like bulldogs in the house, she thought them too ugly."

"What a *cat!*" interpolated the Chaperon.

"Could it be possible that Tibe ever *was* his?" asked Nell. "He sold his dog just a year ago, when he was six months old ——"

"I bought Tibe ten months ago, poor lamb, for a song, because he was ill — he'd been seasick on a long voyage, so I nursed him up, and *see* what he is now," said Tibe's mistress. "It may be he'd belonged to this man, for it's always the strangest things that are true. Tibe has a wonderful memory for faces; but I'm sure if I'd been with him, he wouldn't have run away from me for twenty old masters."

"The *second* queerest thing in the adventure is, that this

'old master' must be some relation of yours, Lady MacNairne," said Nell. "He gave us his card. See, here it is." She handed it to the Chaperon, who gazed at it through her blue spectacles for a moment without speaking; then passed it to Starr. "Merely — a relation by marriage," said she. "Quite a distant relation. I never saw this gentleman myself; but I believe you've met him, haven't you, dear Ronny?"

There is plenty of room on the Mariner's face for expression. He grew red, and his eyebrows were eloquent as he looked at the card. "Oh — er — yes, I've seen him, I think," he mumbled, "when I was in Scotland last. Odd he happens to be here."

"He only arrived this morning, on important business," Nell explained. "If it weren't for that, he would have asked to bring us back to our hotel, but it was something that had to be attended to without a moment's delay, so he was obliged to leave us at once. He was on the way to the Hotel de l'Europe, where he hoped to find the people he'd come to seek."

No need for me to see that card. I knew well who was the hero of the girls' adventure, and would have guessed without the aid of Starr's expression. He saw that I guessed, and turned to me with a look of appeal.

"Well, at all events, Tibe is safe," I said, "and we ought to start, if we're to get through our program to-day. Ladies, is your luggage ready? I'll see that Tibe has a nice bone instead of breakfast. He can eat it in the car, going to the boat; and as it's dusty, you had better put on your motor-veils when you leave the hotel. Starr and I are going to wear goggles."

"Alb," said Starr, as the ladies moved away, "you may have a bad heart, but you have a good head. Disguise and fight are our only hope. If Sir Alec should recognize me ——"

("If he should recognize me," I echoed inwardly.)

"The game would be up."

"Speed, veils, and goggles may do the trick," said I.

"But afterwards? By Jove, what we're let in for!"

"We must set our wits to work. Change 'Lorelei's' name and disappear into space."

Five minutes later we were off, unrecognizable by our best friends, and Tibe well hidden, deeply interested in his bone at the bottom of the *tonneau*. But hardly were we away when Miss Rivers cried out ——

"Oh, look, Nell; there's Sir Alec MacNairne. Oughtn't we to stop a minute, so that Lady MacNairne ——"

"I'm afraid we haven't time," I said hastily, and put on speed, as much as I dared in traffic. We whizzed by a cab, and might have passed the gloomy-faced man who sat in it with his traveling-bag (hastily packed, I'll warrant) had not the two girls bowed.

Their faces were not to be recognized behind the small, triangular talc windows of the silk and lace motor-veils they bought in Haarlem; but their bow attracted Sir Alec MacNairne's attention, and those "quick-tempered blue eyes" of his looked the whole party over as he lifted his hat from his crisply curling auburn hair. He probably divined that the two veiled figures must be the girls of his late adventure; and as he was now acquainted with them and with Tibe, there would be one less chance of our boat slipping away from under his nose, in case he got upon our track.

I realized that Sir Alec could not have been in Scotland when the fatal paragraph appeared, which reached our eyes only yesterday. If he had been, he could not have arrived in Amsterdam to-day. My idea now is that he must have come abroad in search of his wife, have seen the Paris *Herald* at some Continental resort, and have rushed off post-haste to Holland, expecting to find her.

Exactly why he should have choosen Amsterdam to begin

his quest, is not so clear; but he must have had reason to hope that he might get news of Lady MacNairne and my (supposed) motor-boat here. Doubtless he will sooner or later come upon a clue. If he turns up at the Amstel to prosecute his inquiries, he may hear of Tibe, and of the two beautiful young ladies. Then he will put two and two together, and will be after us — as Starr's favorite expression is — "before we can say knife."

At present I have all the sensations of being a villain, with none of the advantages.

XIX

IT seemed homelike to be on board "Lorelei" again, in my place at the wheel, with the two girls and the Chaperon in their deck-chairs close by. Starr had been meaning to make a sketch of the group under the awning, but the dread apparition of his aunt's husband had twisted his nerves like wires struck by lightning, and he could do nothing. His is essentially the artistic temperament, and he is a creature of moods, impish in some, poetic in others; an extraordinary fellow, like no one I ever saw, yet curiously fascinating, and I find myself growing oddly fond of him, in an elder-brotherly, protecting sort of way.

Even I have my moods sometimes, though I can hide them better than he can; and this morning I was in the wrong key for the idyllic peace and prim prettiness of Broek-in-Waterland. I should have liked better to be out on a meer in Friesland, in a stiff breeze; but since it had to be Broek, I made the best of it.

The canal leading to that sleepy little village, which seems to float on the water like a half-closed lily, is one of the prettiest in the Netherlands. Almost at once, after parting from Amsterdam, we turned out of the North Sea Canal; and the smoke and bustle of the port were left behind like a troubled dream. We lifted a veil of sunbright mist, and found ourselves in the country — a friendly country of wide spaces such as we passed through in motoring between Amersfoort and Spaakenberg; of mossy farmhouses and hayfields, grazing cows, and swallows skimming low over little side-canals carpeted with vegetation like a netting of green beads. But

here the hay was not protected by the elevated roofs of thatch we had seen yesterday. It lay in loose heaps of yellowing grass, shining in the sun like giant birds' nests of woven gold; and all the low-lying landscape shimmered pale golden and filmy green, too sweet and fresh for the green of any other country save mine, in mid-July. Here and there a peasant in some striking costume, or a horse in a blue coat, made a spot of color in the pearl and primrose light, under clouds changeful as opal; and each separate, dainty picture of farmhouse, or lock, or group of flags and reeds had its double in the water, lying bright and clear as a painting under glass, until our vandal boat came to shiver picture after picture.

As we moved, our progress not only sent an advance wave racing along the dyke, but tossed up a procession of tiny rainbow fountains, as if we threw handfuls of sapphires and diamonds into the water in passing.

Sometimes we had glimpses of mysterious villages, a line of pink-and-green houses stretching along the canal banks below the level of the water, shielded by rows of trees trained, in the Dutch way, to grow flat and wide, screening the windows as an open fan screens the sparkling eyes of a woman who peeps behind its sticks.

These half-hidden dwelling-places inspired Starr to launch out in a disquisition upon some of the characteristics he has observed among my people.

"Funny thing," said Starr, "the Dutch are a queer mixture of reserve and curiosity. You don't see a town or village where the windows aren't covered with curtains, and protected by squares of blue netting. But though the beings behind those windows are so anxious to live in private, they're consumed with curiosity about what's going on outside. For fear of missing something, they stick up looking-glasses on the walls to tell them what happens in the street. 'Seeing, unseen,' is the motto that ought to be written over the house doors."

"The Lady of Shalott started the fashion," said Nell.

As we drew nearer to Broek-in-Waterland, the landscape, already fragrant with daintiness, began to tidy itself anew, out of deference to Broek's reputation. The smallest and rudest wooden houses on the canal banks had frilled their windows with stiff white curtains and tied them with ribbon. Railings had painted themselves blue or green, and smartened their tips with white. Even the rakes, hoes, and implements of labor had got themselves up in red and yellow, and green buckets had wide-open scarlet mouths.

As we walked to the village, after mooring "Lorelei" at the bridge, the girls laughed and chatted together, but involuntarily they hushed their voices on entering the green shadow of the little town under its slow-marching procession of great trees; and the spell of somnolent silence seized them.

I think no one coming into Broek-in-Waterland could escape that spell. There is no noise there. Even the trees whisper, and not the most badly brought up dog would dare to bark aloud.

"Have you noticed," Nell asked me softly, "that you never hear *sounds* in dreams? No matter how exciting things are, there's never any noise; everything seems to be acted in pantomime. Well, it's like that here. We're dreaming Broek-in-Waterland as we have other places."

"And dreaming each other, too?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Then I hope nothing will happen to wake me up."

Just then we arrived at a dream curiosity-shop which gave her an excuse not to answer.

On the edge of the town it stands, one of the first among the little old houses, which look as if they had been made to accommodate well-to-do dolls of a century or two ago. Modestly retired in a doll's garden, with an imitation stalactite grotto, and groups of miniature statues among box-tree animals, its

door is always open to welcome visitors and allure them. Within, vague splashes of color against a dim background; blues that mean old Delft; yellow that means ancient brass; and all gleaming in the dusk with the strange values that flowers gain in twilight.

I knew that Nell and Phyllis and the Chaperon would not pass by, and they didn't.

There was a man inside, but he did not ask us to buy anything. He had the air of a host, pleased to show his treasures, and the Chaperon feared that I was playing some joke when I encouraged them to invade the quaint and pretty rooms.

"I don't believe it *is* a shop," said she. "It's just an eccentric little house, that belongs to somebody who's away — a dear old maiden lady, perhaps, a collector of antiques, for her own pleasure. This man's her caretaker."

"She's strayed into some other dream, maybe," suggested Nell. "She's lost her way, poor old dear, and can never find it again, to come back, so that's why the things are for sale — if they really *are*. But listen, all the clocks in the house are talking to each other about her. *They* expect her to come, and that's why they keep on ticking, through the years, to make the time seem short in passing; for some of them must have had their hundredth birthday, long, long ago."

"He's a faithful caretaker then, to keep everything in such good order," said Phyllis. "But perhaps he believes what the clocks are saying about the old lady coming back. He's got the sweetest little clean curtains at the windows, and this too adorable wall-bed is ready for her to hop into, and dream the right dream again."

"He'd be mobbed by other Broekites, if he didn't keep things clean," I answered. "You know, Broek-in-Waterland is supposed to be the cleanest place in the Netherlands, which is something of a boast, isn't it? The saying used to be that,

if a leaf dropped off a tree, or a wisp of hay off a passing cart, and one of the inhabitants saw it, he ran out of his house and threw the dreadful thing into the canal."

"Let's scatter a few bits of paper," said Starr, "and see what would happen."

"I'm afraid they're not as observant or energetic as they used to be. I counted three straws on the bricks, coming up."

"What wouldn't I give to have lunch in this house, on that charming old mahogany table, with those Delft plates and pewter mugs," sighed Miss Rivers, her eyes traveling over the old furniture which, as she said, seems to be ready and waiting till the wrong dream shall break.

"I'm going to take you to lunch somewhere else," I told her. "But you can buy Delft plates and pewter mugs here for your own table, if you like."

Then some exchange and barter did take place; although Nell said it seemed cruel to buy anything and separate it from its old friends. One ought to apologize to the things that were left for tearing their companions away.

There was time to step into the nearest cheese factory, and to go on and see the old church, I said, if they didn't mind lunching late. Of course they did not; so we strolled into the show place of Broek, a large house where cows live in neat bedrooms carpeted with something which resembles grated cheese. The Chaperon suggested that, after all, it was nothing but sawdust, and probably she was right; nevertheless each little cubicle in the long row, with its curtained window and blue-white wall, looked pretty enough for a fastidious human being. We should have lingered looking at the cheeses and sniffing dairy smells, but suddenly a tidal wave of tourists from an excursion steamer swept in, swamped us, and swallowed Tibe. He was retrieved after a search, in the doorway of the curiosity-shop, whither he had wisely returned to await his friends, and we then went on past the meer with its deserted

bandstand, to one of the few lovable churches left in my country.

It is whitewashed and bare, but somehow, instead of making it grim, the whiteness has given it a religious look. The old canopied rosewood pulpit makes you feel good, though not disagreeably good, and the brass-work is a joy.

"You've seen a comic opera cheese factory," said I, when we had left the church. "Now, I'll show you the real thing, and then you shall have lunch. It won't be conventional, but I think you'll like it."

"For heaven's sake let's drown our sorrows in cheese, or something else supporting, and soon, or we perish," said the Mariner. "Our blood will then be upon your head, and as it's blue, and you're brown, it won't be at all becoming."

At this, I hurried them on, and presently arrived at a red-brick house set in a little garden. The glass of the white-curtained windows, and the varnished woodwork of the door at which I knocked, glittered so intolerably that they hurt the eyes, and made one envy the Chaperon her blue glasses. It was a relief when the dazzling door flew back to disclose a dim interior, and a delightful old lady in a lace-covered gold helmet, a black dress, and an elaborate apron.

"Something to eat?" she echoed my demand. "But, mynheer, we have nothing which these ladies would fancy. For you two we could do well enough, for you are men, and young. What does it matter what you eat, if it is enough? These ladies will laugh at our fare."

"They'll laugh with pleasure," said I. "You can give us eggs, cheese, bread and butter, and coffee, can't you, and strawberries and cream, perhaps?"

"Yes, mynheer, and some fresh cake."

"Food for kings and queens, as you'll serve it, y'vrouw," I assured her; and we flocked into the hall.

"Would you like to show your friends how we make our

cheese, while I get ready the food?" asked the dame. "If you would, I will send for my son to guide you, though you know it so well yourself, mynheer, you need no explanations."

Her son being one of the principal objects of interest at Wilhelminaberg, however, the visit would not be complete without his society, and his presence was commanded. Promptly he appeared, bringing with him a smell of clover, and milk, and new-made cheese; a young man with the long, clever nose, narrow blue eyes, and length of upper lip, which you can see on any canvas of an old Dutch master.

Wilhelminaberg is not a show place; few tourists find their way there, and it is never flooded by a wave of strangers; but if some of the stage effects are lacking, it is more interesting for that reason.

Starr was captivated with the cows' part of the house, divided from their human companions only by a door. He whipped out the sketch-block and small box of colors which he always carries, and began jotting down impressions. A dash of red for the painted brick walls, and of green for the mangers; a yellow blur for the mote-filled rays of sunshine streaming through the cows' white-curtained windows, and on the flower-pots adorning their window-sills; a trifle more elaboration for the carpet of sawdust stamped with an ornamental pattern, and the quaint design of the cupboard-beds for the stablemen in the wall opposite; a streak here and there for the cords which loop the cows' tails to nails in the ceiling; gorgeous spots of crimson and yellow for the piled cheeses. And in the adjoining room, the while our guide described in creditable English the process of cheese-making, Starr sketched him standing before his big blue press, printing out the molds with an odd, yellow reflection from the cheese cannon-balls heaped on trays, shining up into the shrewd Dutch face. Then in came the young wife, with a child or two (pretty dark creatures like their mother, with the innocent brown eyes of

calves), followed by grandmama in her gold helmet, to say that our meal was ready; and Starr induced them to stand for him, though they were reluctant and self-conscious, and it was by sheer fascination that he prevailed.

Never had any of the party except myself seen a room like that to which we were summoned for luncheon, and Starr could not eat until he had said in a "few words of paint" what he thought of its paneled walls, its shelves littered with quaint and foolish china, ostrich eggs, shells, model ships, and hundred-year-old toys; its ancient brass-handled chests of drawers, its extraordinary fireplace, and best of all, its white-curtained cupboard-beds; one for grandmama, with a kind of trapeze arrangement to help her rise; one for papa and mama, with an inner shelf like a nest for baby; and one with a fence for a parcel of children. The artist's cream-eggs grew cold while he worked, but it was worth the sacrifice, for the result was excellent, and Nell's admiration gave me, I'm ashamed to say, a qualm of jealousy. I have no such accomplishments with which to win her.

We sat in high chairs with pictures of ships painted on backs and arms, while we lunched off willow-patterned plates, drank delicious coffee out of cups with feet, and stirred it with antique silver spoons, small enough for children's playthings. Afterwards the old lady with the helmet, and the pretty daughter-in-law were persuaded to show their winter wardrobes, which consisted mostly of petticoats. There were dozens, some knitted of heavy wool, some quilted in elaborate patterns, and some of thick, fleecy cloth; but there was not one weighing less than three pounds.

"Do ask how many they wear at a time?" the Chaperon commanded, no doubt with a thought for her mysterious notebook, about which I often wonder.

"I wear eight, summer and winter," replied the old lady. "My daughter-in-law is of the younger generation, and does

not put on more than six. Little Maria is allowed only four; it is better for children not to carry much weight."

The girls looked petrified. "What martyrdom!" exclaimed Nell. "Even the Duke of Alva couldn't have subjected Dutch women to much worse torture than that. Eight of these knitted and wadded petticoats in summer! It's being buried alive up to the waist. In the name of civilization, *why* do they do it?"

I passed on the question to the old lady. She and her daughter-in-law received it gravely, thought it over for a moment, and then replied ——

"But we must do it, mynheer; it is the mode. It has always been the mode."

"Talk of slaves of fashion!" muttered Nell. "If you want to find them, don't look in London or Paris or New York, but among the peasantry of Holland!"

Not one of the three could recover from the shock. They seemed stunned, as if all the petticoats at once had fallen from the shelves onto their heads and overwhelmed them; and even when we had said good-by to Wilhelminaberg, they talked in hushed tones of what it must feel like to be clothed in eight petticoats. They would probably have gone on discussing the subject in all its phases, until we regained the boat, if something had not happened. It was just after we passed the bandstand in the meer, and Starr had wondered aloud if the inhabitants of Broek ever did revel so giddily and publicly as to come outside their gardens to hear music, when there was a loud splash, followed by a cry.

The splash was Tibe's, the cry his mistress's, and in an instant we were in a flutter, for the dog was in the lake.

Close to shore the water is coated over with lily-pads, mingling with a bright green, beady vegetation; and Tibe mistook it for a meadow. Standing at a considerable elevation on the road above, he leaped down with happy confidence, only to be deceived as many wiser than he have been, by

Starr induced them to stand for him, though they were reluctant and self-conscious

appearances. Bulldogs have virtues all their own, but they are not spaniels; and there was despair in Tibe's brown eyes, as he threw one last look of appeal at his friends before disappearing under the green carpet.

Up he came in a second, covered with green beads, his black mouth choked with them. Although not a water-dog, instinct kept him afloat, and he began to swim awkwardly, forging farther from shore instead of nearer. In a moment he had tangled his legs among thick-growing, ropey stems of water-lilies, and frightened and confused at finding himself a prisoner, went down again under the green surface.

Meanwhile his mistress was half mad with fright, and would not listen to Starr's assurance that the dog was in no danger.

"He'll bob up serenely and swim close to us; then I'll hook my stick in his collar and pull him out," the Mariner said cheerfully; but she pushed him away, sobbing.

Now, I never could bear to see a woman cry, even a woman in blue spectacles; so I did not wait for Tibe to come up and recover presence of mind, as he probably would, but splashed down myself onto the green carpet.

The water hardly reached to my hips, so there was no bravery in the feat, and I felt a fool as I went wading out to the spot where, by this time, the dog's head had again appeared among the water-lily pads, the living image of a gargoyle. But as I hauled him out, with a word of encouragement, the poor chap's gratitude repaid me. Looking like a *vert-de-gris* statue of a dog, he licked such portions of me as he could reach with a green tongue, and blessed me with his beautiful eyes.

When I had him on *terra firma* we both shook ourselves, sending an emerald spray flying in all directions; and then abortive attempts were made to dry Tibe with the handkerchiefs of the united party. A few hurried "Thank you's" were

all I got from the Chaperon at the time, but on board "Lorelei" she had something more to say.

Before starting, I had to go to my stateroom on "Waterspin" to change wet clothes for dry ones, and when I was ready to take up my part of skipper, no one was on deck save the Chaperon and Tibe — a subdued Tibe buttoned up in a child's cape, which his mistress insisted on buying in Amsterdam for him to wear in cold weather.

"My poor darling spattered the girls so much, that they're below taking off their frocks," she explained. "Mr. Starr's changing too, I think, but I waited to speak to you alone, although I am a *sight*. I have something particular to say."

I looked a question, and she went on. "I've always liked you, from the first. I saw you were the kind of man who could be trusted never to injure a woman, no matter what your opinion of her might be, and I'd have done you a good turn if it had come in my way; but now, after what I owe you this afternoon, I'm ready to go *out* of my way. You won't think I'm an interfering"— she hesitated a moment —"old thing, if I say I can guess why you are skipper — why you're on this trip at all. Now, if you wanted to be disagreeable I expect you could say that you *know* why I'm on board; but I don't believe you do want to be disagreeable, do you?"

"Certainly not," said I, laughing. "And even if I did, there's an old proverb which forbids the pot to call the kettle black."

"Oh, you and I and my dear nephew Ronny are pots and kettles together, the three of us; but our *hearts* are all right. And talking of hearts leads up to what I want to say."

"About my job as skipper?"

"Yes."

"You say you can guess why I took it. My idea is, that you guessed the first day on board."

"Why, of *course* I did. I saw which one of the girls it was,

too, and noticed that something had gone wrong. That interested me, for I'm observant."

"You're 'a chiel amang us takkin notes.' "

"Think of a Dutchman quoting that! However, even peasants in Holland break into English and German. Why shouldn't a Jonkheer spout Burns? But let me get to my point. I haven't found out what the trouble is, but I know you must have sinned against the girl in some way, or done something tactless, which is worse, and made her angry. Or else she felt it was her *duty* to be angry, and has been living up to it ever since. Talk of the 'way of a man with a maid!' The way of a maid with a man is funnier and more subtle. Nell Van Buren is an adorable girl, but the more adorable a girl is, the more horried she can be."

"That *is* subtle."

"Why, of course. What else should it be? And the whole thing's been as good as a play to watch. I wished you well from the beginning, but I thought you capable of taking care of yourself."

"And now you've changed your mind?"

"I have, since yesterday. I'm sure something happened at Amsterdam in the morning, she was so different. What did you do to her?"

"I bullied her a little," I said.

"I *thought* as much. How could you?"

"I believed it would be good for her."

"So it was. But it wasn't good for you."

"She has been angelic since."

"That's the danger-signal. Poor man, you couldn't see it?"

"I was rather encouraged — though it seemed too delightful to be true," I admitted.

"Men are blind — especially when they're in love. You understand motor-boats better than you do girls."

"I dare say," I said meekly.

"She's so nice to you because she means to punish you by-and-by, for humbling her pride. I'm warning you, as a reward for saving my treasured lamb. If Tibe hadn't fallen into the water, and you hadn't pulled him out, perhaps I'd have left you to founder, and watched the fun. But now I say, take care. She's dangerous."

"How can you tell?" I asked.

"How can I tell? Because I'm a woman, of course, and because I should act just the same — if I were young."

"Well, if you're right, what am I to do?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about. You must pretend to be tired of her."

"Good heavens!"

"She mustn't see that she has any power over you. She cares for you more than she lets herself think."

"I wish to goodness I could believe that."

"There's no use in your believing it. The thing is, to make *her* believe it — make her find it out, with a shock. And there's only one way of doing that."

"What?"

"Rouse her to jealousy."

I laughed bitterly. "Tell me to get her the moon."

"Flirt with Miss Rivers."

"My dear madam, you've proved to me that I'm a fool; but I'm neither cad nor hypocrite."

"Dear me, if *that's* the way you're going to take it, you're lost. Our dear Ronny will snatch her from under your nose, although she isn't a bit in love with him, and *is* with you, if you'd consent to shake her up a little."

"Starr is in love with them both."

"He was; or rather he was in love with being in love. But because you want Miss Van Buren, out of pure contrariness he thinks now that he wants her. Beware of her kindness. If you should be deluded by it into proposing, she'd send you

about your business, and perhaps accept the other man because she was wretched, and didn't quite realize what was the matter."

"You're a gloomy prophetess," I said miserably.

"You won't take my advice?"

"No. I can't do that. I must do the best I can for myself in some other way."

"There isn't any other."

"I shall try."

"Well, promise me you won't propose for a fortnight, anyhow; or until I give you leave."

"We — all — always — do whatever you wish us to, extraordinary lady. I wonder why?"

"You must go on wondering. But in the meantime I will — "

"You will ——"

"Try to save you — as you saved Tibe."

XX

THE Mariner was restless when we landed at the strange town of Monnikendam, and had the air — or I imagined it — of expecting something. As we walked through the wide Hoog Straat, he glanced absent-mindedly at the rows of beautiful seventeenth century houses, as if he feared to see Sir Alec MacNairne spring from behind some ornamented, ancient door, to accuse him as a perjured villain. Even the exquisite church tower, which has the semblance of holding aloft a carved goblet of old silver, did not appeal to him as it would if he had not been preoccupied. And instead of laughing at the crowds of children who clattered after us, waking the clean and quiet streets with the ring of sabots, he let them get upon his nerves. The girls were amused, however, and said that the little pestering voices babbling broken English without sense or sequence, were like the voices of the story in the "Arabian Nights"— haunting voices which tempted you to turn round, although you had been warned beforehand that, if you did, you would lose your human form and become a stone.

Tibe was the real attraction; a sadder and wiser Tibe than the Tibe of an hour ago, so sad and so wise that he did not even attempt to insist upon a friendship with three snow-white kids which joined the procession of his admirers.

Starr walked beside his aunt, as if to protect her in case of need; and once or twice when I tried to attract their attention to some notable façade or doorway, they were absorbed in conversation, and might as well have been in New York as in Monnikendam on the Zuider Zee.

When I had shown the party what I thought best worth seeing, I had to leave them to their own resources, and go alone to the boat. Hendrik could not navigate "Lorelei" and her square-shouldered companion through the series of locks by which the canal pours its soul into the heart of the Zuider Zee.

It took me half an hour to do it, and when I had brought the two craft to the last of the sea-locks, the four people and the one dog were waiting for me, the most persistent of the children hovering in the distance.

"It's a bigger town than Broek-in-Waterland, but not as interesting," said the Chaperon, looking back disparagingly in the direction of Monnikendam, "nor as clean. I saw five bits of paper in as many streets, and a woman we met didn't appear at all inclined to commit suicide because she'd desecrated the pavement by upsetting a pail of milk: whereas in Broek she'd have been hauled off to prison. Each house in Broek looked like a model in jewelry, and the whole effect was like a *presepio* cut in pasteboard; but the Monnikendam houses are big enough for people to lie out straight in, when they go to bed, which seems quite commonplace. Except for that church tower, and a few doorways, and the wonderful costumes, and the shoe-shop where they sell nothing but sabots, I don't see why we bothered to stop at Monnikendam."

"I thought you were keen to visit the Dead Cities of the Zuider Zee," said I.

She stared at me as blankly as if she had not been prophesying my doom a little while ago.

"What's that got to do with Monnikendam?" she demanded.

"Only that Monnikendam *is* one of the Dead Cities; your first," I explained; but she cried incredulously ——

"Monnikendam a Dead City of the Zuider Zee? *Say* it isn't true."

"I'm afraid it is."

"Oh, then I *am* disappointed! I thought we should come to the Dead Cities along the shore of the sea. That we'd see grass-grown streets lined with empty houses fallen half to pieces, and that perhaps if the water were clear we could look down, down, and spy steeples and ruined castles glimmering at the bottom. Won't some be like that?"

"Not one," I said. "They won't be any deader than Monnikendam, which was once the playground of merchant princes. I thought it was dead enough."

"Not to please me," she answered, with the air of a Madame Defarge in blue spectacles.

The Mariner came up before we had got into open sea. For the moment the three ladies were occupied in watching Tibe, who had fallen asleep in his cape, and was running with all his feet in some wild dream, flickering in every muscle, and wrinkling his black mug into alarming grimaces.

"Look here," said Starr, cautiously, "do you think we can paint out the name of 'Lorelei' when we get to Volendam, or must we engage a man to do it? Of course, if we could, it would cause less remark, especially if we did the job in the evening or early morning."

"What! you took that idea of mine seriously?" I asked.

"Certainly. It was a brilliant one."

"I doubt if Miss Van Buren would consent," said I.

"She has, already."

"By Jove! What excuse did you make for asking her?"

"I didn't ask her. What I did was to put the notion into darling Auntie's head. I knew after that, the thing was as good as done. I remarked in my vaguest way that it was a wonder some catastrophe hadn't happened to Tibe or other less important members of the party, on board a boat named 'Lorelei.' I didn't exactly *say* it was an unlucky name, but somehow or other she seemed to think so at the end of our

conversation. Then she had a conversation with Miss Van Buren; and the consequence is that the sooner 'Lorelei's' name is changed to 'Mascotte' the better the owner will be pleased; and no questions asked."

"By Jove!" said I, again. There's something uncanny about the Mariner's adopted relative. I would give a good deal to know what she's planning to do for me; for if she has decided that my name had better be painted on or off any heart of her acquaintance, I have little doubt it will be.

Once out of the sluice, we were immediately in the Zuider Zee, whose yellow waves rocked "Lorelei" as if she were a cradle, causing the barge to wallow heavily in our wake. Should the weather be rough at any time when we have seaports to visit, "Lorelei" and her consort will have to lie in harbor, and the party must be satisfied to do the journey on a commonplace passenger-boat. But on such a day as this there was no danger, no excuse for seasickness, although I half expected the ladies to ask if we were safe. Apparently, however, the doubt did not enter their heads. So far we have had neither accident nor stoppage of any kind, and they have ceased to think it possible that anything can happen to the motor.

Marken, with its tall-spired church, soon appeared to our eyes, the closely grouped little island-town seeming to float on the waves as San Giorgio Maggiore does at Venice, in the sunset hour.

In spite of my sneers at the island theater and its performers, eagerness betrayed itself in the manner of my passengers, as we approached Marken, full petrol ahead.

"They see us," I announced, as we drew near enough to make out that a crowd of huge green and yellow mounds massed in the harbor were hay-boats. "They're congratulating themselves on an unexpected harvest, as the big audiences for which they cater every morning and afternoon in summer are gone for the day. When we arrive, there'll be a

stage-setting and a stage-grouping, which would make a 'hit' for a first act in London."

Still nearer we came, and now we could see men and women and little children playing at unloading the hay with pitchforks from boats large and small. It was the prettiest sight imaginable, and one felt that there ought to be an accompaniment of light music from a hidden orchestra.

The men were dressed in black and dark blue jerseys, or long jackets with silver buttons, and enormously loose trousers, each leg of which gave the effect of a half-deflated balloon. At their brown throats glittered knobs of silver or gold, and there was another lightning-flash of precious metal at the waist. Their hair was cut straight across the forehead, over the ears and at the back of the neck, as if the barber had clapped on a bowl and trimmed round it; and from under the brims of impudent looking caps, glowed narrow, defiant blue eyes.

But though the men are well enough as pictures, it is the women and children of Marken who have made the fortune of the little island as a show place; and to-day they were at their best, raking the golden hay, their yellow hair, their brilliant complexions, and still more brilliant costumes dazzling in the afternoon sunlight.

We landed, and nobody appeared to pay the slightest attention to us. That is part of the daily play; but I was the only one who knew this, and seeing these charming, wonderful creatures peacefully pursuing their pastoral occupations as if there were no stranger eyes to stare, I was reproached for my base insinuations.

"How could you call them 'sharpers'?" cried Phyllis. "They're loves — darlings. I could kiss every one of them. They have the most angelic faces, and the children — why, they're *cherubs*."

It was true. The picture was idyllic, if slightly sensational in coloring. There was scarcely a woman who was not pretty;

and a female thing must be plain indeed not to look charming in the gorgeous costume of Marken. The snow-and-rose complexions, the sky-blue eyes, the golden fringe, and two long yellow curls, one on either side the face, falling to the breast from under tight-fitting mob caps covered with lace; the short, very full blue and black skirts; the richly embroidered bodices, brilliant as the breast of a parrot; the filmy fichus and white sleeves; the black sabots with painted wreaths of roses, turned the little harbor of Marken into a rare flower-garden. The expressions of the fair faces were beautifully mild, also, and it was not strange to hear Miss Rivers pronounce the women angels and the children cherubs.

The group at the hay-boats formed the chorus; but we had not been on land for many minutes before the principal characters in the play began to appear. A young girl, who might be called the leading lady, came tripping down to the harbor with a tiny child hanging to each hand. All three were apparently dressed alike, in rich embroideries and full skirts to their ankles, worn over an incredible number of petticoats; but I could tell by a small rosette on the cap of the middle child that it was a boy.

The trio approached, smiling seraphically; and it goes without saying that the three ladies began petting the two fantastic babes.

"How do you do? You like see inside a Marken house?" asked the pretty girl, speaking English with the voice of a young siren.

They all answered that they would be delighted.

"I show my home. You come with me."

Starr and I were bidden to follow, and I would not spoil sport by letting it be known to the actress that one member of the audience was a Dutchman. The charming creature with her two bobbing golden curls was knitting a stocking almost as long as her little brother, and as she turned to show the way,

she never for an instant ceased work. Toiling after her, we walked along the dyke where the fishermen's houses stand in rows, hoisted on poles like storks' nests, out of the reach of inundations.

Needles glittering, our guide led us to the foot of a steep flight of steps belonging to a house like all the other houses; so much like, that it would seem we were being ushered into an ordinary specimen of a fisher-family dwelling; but I knew better.

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In all Europe there is no such place as Marken, no such dresses, no such golden curls, no such rooms as these into which a coquettishly capped mother with a marvelous doll of a baby in her arms, was sweetly inviting us.

"Only think of these fisher-folk living in such wonderful little jewel-caskets of houses!" exclaimed Phyllis, to be echoed by murmurs of admiration from the others. But I said nothing. And it really was like wandering into a fairy picture-book. It was impossible to imagine any other house resembling this, unless that of Silverhair's Three Bears.

The polished green walls were almost hidden with brightly colored Dutch placks, and shelves covered with little useless ornaments. The chairs were yellow, with roses painted over them, and varnished till they twinkled. The family beds in the wall had white curtains as crisp as new banknotes, and white knitted coverlets with wool-lace ruffles; but as the green doors of the beds were kept shut for the day, you would not have suspected the elegance within, had not the Siren opened them for inspection. Under the door of each bed was placed a little red bench, festooned with painted flowers; and as there were nine in the family and only four beds, counting the little

one underneath for the babies, the disposition of forces at night did not bear thinking of.

All the tables had crocheted white covers, and were decked with vases and fresh flowers, glittering brass and pewter things, and gay old china. But it was the next room — a small one adjoining the big living-room — which roused the highest admiration. There was not much furniture, but up to the low ceiling the walls were concealed by shelves laden with gorgeously painted wooden boxes, little and big. They were of all colors and all brightly varnished. Some were plain blue, or green, or crimson; others had Dutch or Japanese scenery painted on their sides, and the largest could not have been more than a foot and a half long, by eight inches in height.

"This must be where they keep their cake and bread, and kitchen stores," said Miss Rivers; but with a smile the Siren began to open the boxes.

Instead of sugar and spices they contained the family wardrobe; folded neck-handkerchiefs in great variety; little embroidered jackets for the children; lace-covered caps; bodices, and even — in the largest boxes — petticoats.

The ladies, and Starr also, were charmed with everything, especially the dark, secretive loft, as full of suspended fishing nets as Bluebeard's closet was of wives. They had never seen such a distracting place as Marken, or such kind and pretty people. It was nearly an hour before is occurred to them that they had better say good-by, and by that time they knew the whole history of the interesting family.

They shook hands with each one of the nine, including the baby, patted the cat and then lingered outside, taking photographs. Some of the neighbors — young women and girls, with dimples in the roses of their cheeks — drew nearer, as if lured by admiration of the ladies. Nell and Phyllis, seeing them, beckoned, and the fair creatures obeyed the summons with an appearance of shyness. They too, were photographed;

cherubs! I think you are good, Jonkheer, not to say, 'I told you so.' "

"They're terrible — beautiful and terrible," said Starr, "like figures that have been brought to life and have sprung at you out of a picture, to suck your blood — in answer to some wicked wish, that you regret the minute it's uttered."

"It was a shock to be undeceived, just at the last!" sighed Phyllis. "My nerves are quite upset."

"I shall dream of them to-night," said Nell; "so don't be surprised, everybody, if you hear screams in the dark hours. Still, I'm glad we went; I wouldn't have missed it."

"Nor I," added the Chaperon. "I feel as if we'd paid a visit to some village of the Orient, and been repulsed by savages with great slaughter. And — I wasn't going to mention it if they'd stayed nice, it would have seemed so *treacherous;* but did you notice, in that wonderful little waxwork house, there was no visible place to *wash?* "

"They don't wash," said I, "except their hands and faces. Most Dutch peasants consider bathing a dirty habit. They say they are clean, and so, of course, they don't need to bathe."

"That makes them seem more like birds than ever," exclaimed Nell; "their clothes are only plumage. I think of them as real people living real lives. It's true, Marken's a theater, three thousand meters long and a thousand meters wide, and you pay the actors for your seats. The harbor itself isn't half as picturesque as Spaakenberg, with its crowding masts and brown haze of fishing-nets; but the people are worth paying for."

"Tourists like ourselves have spoiled them; they were genuine once," I said. "Probably Spaakenberg, which is so unsophisticated now, will be like Marken one day; and even at Volendam, though the people have kept their heads (which shows they have a sense of humor), they're not unaware of their artistic value.

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and after many politenesses had been exchanged, Starr came to ask if I thought the dear things' feelings would be hurt by a small offering of money.

"They may, and probably will be — if the offering is small," said I, dryly.

"What are you insinuating?" exclaimed Nell.

Meanwhile the Siren, her sisters and brothers, and a number of handsome friends of her own age, pinned wary eyes upon us. The dimples were in abeyance, for the guileless angels guessed the subject of conversation, and were preparing for eventualities.

"I don't think they'll refuse money," I said. "In fact, they expect it."

"How much ought we to give?" asked Starr.

"Whatever you have handy, and whatever you think it's worth," said I, exploring my pockets for silver.

"I suppose the family would be delighted with the gulden," suggested Phyllis. "We might hand one child another, to divide among her little friends, and buy them sweets."

"You can try that, and see if they thank you," I replied.

"Why, of course they will," said the Chaperon. "It's easy to see that they have lovely dispositions, except the little boy who was afraid of Tibe, just because he tried in play to bite off the button on the back of his cap."

I stood still and watched the others reviewing their change, putting their bits of silver together to make up the sum decided upon, as small money is always at a premium. I did not add my mite to the fund, for I knew what would happen in the end.

Finally, Phyllis was chosen as emissary for the party.

"Good-by again," she said sweetly to our late guide. "Here's something for your little brothers and sisters to remember us by; and will you ask your companions to buy themselves some sweets with the rest?"

But in a second the Siren was transformed into a harpy. Her blue eyes turned to steel, and shot lightning. The children, understanding the situation, stood by looking like little sharks, and the handsome friends suddenly assumed the air of fierce wild birds in the Zoo, just tame enough to eat out of your hand if you offer what they like, but hating and scorning you in their cold hearts — the bright-plumaged things; ready to bite your finger to the bone, should you tease instead of feed them.

Our guide held up a hand with all her fingers spread out. "Five! Five!" she demanded shrilly. "Every one of you give one gulden. All this you gave is to my friends. Not enough for me. I have more. I *always* have more. One gulden every person."

"Nonsense," said I in Dutch. "Here's another gulden. Take that and go away. It's twice too much for you."

I flung her the money, and she clutched it; but she had not finished with us yet, nor had the others. Surprised and horrified at the sudden change in the pink and white angels, the ladies turned away, and hurried toward the boat. For an instant the creatures were abashed by my knowledge of Dutch, but it was only for an instant. The mother of nine, standing in the doorway of the green bandbox house, baby in arms, shrieked encouragement to her daughter. The Siren clattered after us with angrily ringing sabots, raging for money; the children cried; the friends shouted frank criticisms of our features, our hats, our manners. I would have gone away without rewarding their blackmail with another penny; but in desperation Starr turned and dashed four or five gulden at the crowd. The coins rolled, and the bright beings swooped, more than ever like a flock of gaudy, savage birds in their greed.

Thus we left them, and I saw that the ladies were thankful to be safe aboard "Lorelei" again.

"Fiends!" gasped the Chaperon, gazing shoreward in a kind of evil fascination. "And we called them angels and

cherubs! I think you are good, Jonkheer, not to say, 'I told you so.' "

"They're terrible — beautiful and terrible," said Starr, "like figures that have been brought to life and have sprung at you out of a picture, to suck your blood — in answer to some wicked wish, that you regret the minute it's uttered."

"It was a shock to be undeceived, just at the last!" sighed Phyllis. "My nerves are quite upset."

"I shall dream of them to-night," said Nell; "so don't be surprised, everybody, if you hear screams in the dark hours. Still, I'm glad we went; I wouldn't have missed it."

"Nor I," added the Chaperon. "I feel as if we'd paid a visit to some village of the Orient, and been repulsed by savages with great slaughter. And — I wasn't going to mention it if they'd stayed nice, it would have seemed so *treacherous;* but did you notice, in that wonderful little waxwork house, there was no visible place to *wash?* "

"They don't wash," said I, "except their hands and faces. Most Dutch peasants consider bathing a dirty habit. They say they are clean, and so, of course, they don't need to bathe."

"That makes them seem more like birds than ever," exclaimed Nell; "their clothes are only plumage. I think of them as real people living real lives. It's true, Marken's a theater, three thousand meters long and a thousand meters wide, and you pay the actors for your seats. The harbor itself isn't half as picturesque as Spaakenberg, with its crowding masts and brown haze of fishing-nets; but the people are worth paying for."

"Tourists like ourselves have spoiled them; they were genuine once," I said. "Probably Spaakenberg, which is so unsophisticated now, will be like Marken one day; and even at Volendam, though the people have kept their heads (which shows they have a sense of humor), they're not unaware of their artistic value.

"They look down on the islanders as theatrical; but it's partly jealousy. Marken has a history, you know; it was once connected with the mainland, but that was as long ago as the thirteenth century, and ever since the inhabitants have prided themselves on their old customs and costumes. They're proud of the length of time they've dared to be Protestant; and no Marken man would dream of crossing to Papist Volendam for a wife, though Volendam's celebrated for beautiful girls. Nor would any of the 'fierce, tropical birds,' as you call them, exchange their island roost for the mainland, although Marken, in times of flood, is a most uncomfortable perch, and the birds have to go about in boats. But here we come to Volendam, and you'll be able to make up your mind which of the two fishing-villages is more interesting."

We had crossed the short expanse of sea, and passing a small lighthouse were entering a square harbor lined with fishing-boats. Stoutly built, solid fishing-boats they were, meant for stormy weather; and their metal pennons, which could never droop in deadest calm, flew bravely, all in the same direction, like flags in a company of lances in an old Froissart picture.

"Is Volendam celebrated for tall men as well as beautiful girls?" asked Nell, as we drew near enough to see figures moving. "There are several there, but one is almost the tallest man I ever saw — except my cousin Robert."

"He looks singularly like your cousin Robert," added Starr, not too joyously.

"I think it *is* your cousin Robert," said I.

"I'm sure it is your cousin Robert," murmured Miss Rivers.

"But why is your cousin Robert here?" inquired the Chaperon. "Could he have known you were coming?"

"I didn't write to him," said Nell.

"I didn't," said I.

Nobody else spoke; but Miss Rivers blushed.

PHYLLIS RIVERS' POINT OF VIEW

XXI

I WROTE to Mr. van Buren because he asked me to. He never approved of the trip, and he said that he would be much obliged if I'd drop him a line every few days to keep him from worrying about Nell.

I didn't mention the conversation to her, as she would be sure to think it nonsense, since he lived without hearing about her welfare for twenty years, and never gave himself a moment's anxiety. But, of course, that was different. She is in his country now, and he feels in a way responsible for her, as if he were a guardian; only he can't make her do things, because he has no legal rights. Besides, he is young — not more than five or six years older than she is — but I wish I had such a guardian. Instead of going against his advice, I would obey, and even ask for it.

Mr. van Buren is the wisest young man I ever met, as well as the best looking, and I am vexed with Nell because she treats him as if he were a big school-boy. To make up for her ingratitude — I'm afraid it amounts to that — I have tried to show that *I* appreciate his kindness. As he's engaged, I can be nice without danger of his fancying that I'm flirting; and the poor fellow has seemed pleased with the few little things I've been able to do by way of expressing our thanks. I wish I could believe that the girl he's going to marry is good enough for him, but she is *so* plain, and seems to have rather an uncertain temper. Nell says she is a "little cat," but I should be sorry to call any girl such a name, though I've

known many cats better looking and more agreeable than she.

I have always been brought up to think it rather rude to send postcards, unless they are picture ones for people to put in their albums; and of course it would be silly flooding Mr. van Buren with pictures of places he has seen dozens of times, so when I have written to him, I felt obliged to write regular letters.

I meant to scribble a line or two; but Holland is so fascinating that I have found myself running on about it, and Mr. van Buren has seemed grateful because it's his native land, and the places he likes best have turned out to be my favorites. In that way we have happened to write each other quite long letters, almost every day, for he has wanted to tell me I must be sure to see so and so, or do so and so, and I have had to answer that I have seen it or done it, and liked it as much as he thought I would.

If our trip could be improved it would be by having Mr. van Buren with us; but naturally that's impossible, as he's a man of affairs, and Freule Menela van der Windt would hardly sympathize with his kind wish to take care of his cousin, if he carried it so far as to leave her for any length of time, simply on account of Nell. As it is, his letters, and exchanging ideas with him, have been a pleasure to me, and I should have liked to share it with Nell — as we always have shared everything — if I hadn't been afraid she would laugh. Her cousin is too fine a fellow to be laughed at, so I have protected him by keeping our correspondence to myself.

I didn't want to come to Holland, as it seemed such a terrifying adventure for Nell and me to rush away from England and go darting about in a motor-boat; and so horribly extravagant to spend all the money poor Captain Noble left, in enjoying ourselves for a few weeks. However, it *was* to be, and there is something about Holland which appeals to me

more than I dreamed any country except England could. I loved it almost from the minute we landed; but when you like any person in a foreign place it makes you like the place itself better.

I do think Holland is the most complete little country imaginable. While you are in it, it feels like the whole world, because you appear to be in the very middle of the world; and, when you look over the wide, flat spaces, you think that your eyes reach to the end of everything.

And then, all you see is so characteristic of Holland, even the sunrises and sunsets. Nothing that you find in Holland could be in its right place anywhere else on earth; but perhaps one can hardly say that Holland *is* on earth. Now I've got to kown the "Hollow Land" (as Jonkheer Brederode often calls it), I think if I were kidnapped from England, taken up in a balloon, and dropped down here, even in a town I'd never seen, and without *any* canals, I should say, the minute I opened my eyes and found my breath, "Why, I'm in dear little Holland."

I should like to be here in winter. Mr. van Buren says if we'll come he'll teach me to skate; and, according to Jonkheer Brederode, he is a "champion long-distance skater." But then Mr. van Buren told me the same thing about Jonkheer Brederode. They are great friends. And talking about the Jonkheer, I don't know what to make of him lately.

I believed at first that he was in love with Nell, and had got himself asked on board "Lorelei" so that he might have the chance of knowing her better. She had the same impression, I think, though she never said so to me, and she was very angry about something Freule Menela told us. It seems there was a bet, I don't know exactly about what, except that Nell was concerned in it, and Mr. van Buren mentioned it to his fiancée. She oughtn't to have repeated it to us, but she did, and gave the impression that Jonkheer Brederode was a tremendous

flirt, who fancied himself irresistible with women. She warned us both that if he won his bet, and contrived to meet us again, we weren't to be carried away by any signs of admiration on his part, for it was just his way, and he would be too pleased if we showed ourselves flattered.

This made Nell *furious*, and she said that in her opinion Jonkheer Brederode ought to be flattered if we were in the least nice to him, but she for one didn't intend to be.

I was a little prejudiced against him, too, although I admired him very much when I saw him in the Prinzenhof at Delft, and afterwards at the *Concours Hippique*. I thought Nell might, in any case, be grateful to him for saving her when the bathing-machine horse ran away with her into the sea.

I didn't tell Mr. van Buren what Freule Menela said, for it would have been mean, as he might have felt vexed with her. But for his sake, as Jonkheer Brederode is such a hero in his eyes, I determined if ever we saw the Jonkheer again I wouldn't judge him too severely, and would give him the benefit of the doubt as long as I could.

It was a surprise, though, to find that he was the "friend" Mr. Starr had got as skipper, when the real skipper — the professional one — failed at the last moment.

Naturally, I remembered instantly about the bet, which somehow concerned his being introduced to Nell within a certain length of time — so Freule Menela said — and I couldn't help thinking it was impertinent, winning it in such a way on Nell's own boat.

However, Nell was so horrid to him from the first minute, I grew sorry for the poor fellow, and he took her snubs like a combination of saint and gentleman. The more I saw of him the more I began to feel that Freule Menela van der Windt must have done him an injustice, at least in some of the things she told us.

I try to keep watch over my temper always, and I hope it

isn't too bad; yet I'm certain that in Jonkheer Brederode's place I couldn't have endured Nell's behavior, but would have stopped being skipper the second day out, even if I left a whole party of inoffensive people stranded. Instead of leaving us in the lurch after undertaking to act as skipper, however, he has worked for us like a Trojan. Not only has he been skipper, but guide, philosopher and friend — to say nothing of chauffeur on shore, and "general provider" of motor-cars, carriages, surprise-dinners, flowers, and fruit on board the boat.

The trip would have been comparatively tame, if it hadn't been for him, as none of the rest of us know anything about Holland, and he knows everything. No trouble has seemed too much for him, if it could add in any way to our happiness; and I thought it was all for Nell.

He looked at her so wistfully sometimes, and such a dark red came up to his forehead when she said anything particularly sarcastic or snubbing, that even if he deserved it I couldn't bear to see him treated so, while he was doing everything for our pleasure. So I tried to be nice to him, just as I have to Mr. van Buren; and, oddly enough, both times with the same motive — to make up for Nell's naughtiness.

I could see that the Jonkheer was grateful, and liked me a little; but the night Mr. van Buren met us at Volendam so unexpectedly Lady MacNairne gave Nell and me both quite a shock. She said she had it on very *good authority* that it was entirely a mistake about Jonkheer Brederode being in love with Nell. Perhaps he had wished to blind people by making them think so, but it was really for *my* sake he had suggested to his friend, Mr. Starr, that he should be skipper of "Lorelei."

"I won't go so far as to say," Lady MacNairne went on, "that he's actually in love with Phyllis" (she calls us "Phyllis" and "Nell" now), "but he was so much taken that he wished to make her acquaintance. At present it entirely rests with

Phyllis whether he goes on to fall in love or stops at admiration."

She said this before Nell; and although Nell has behaved so hatefully to him (except for the last three or four days, when she has been nicer), she didn't look as much relieved as I should in her place. She went very pink, and then very pale, with anger at Lady MacNairne for talking on such a subject, she explained afterwards. But at the time she didn't show any resentment against Lady MacNairne. She only laughed and said, "Dear me, how interesting. What shall you do about it, Phil?"

"I shall show him that I am *his friend*," I answered decidedly. "I like and admire him, and I hope I shall keep his friendship always."

"That's a pretty beginning to what may be a pretty romance, isn't it, Tibe, darling?" asked Lady MacNairne.

I tried not to blush, but usually the more you try not to blush the more you do. It was so with me then, just as it was when we were coming into harbor at Volendam, and everybody said to Nell, "There is your cousin Robert!" or "Why is your cousin Robert here?"

I was glad to stoop down and pat Tibe, who is the nicest dog I ever knew. It's true, as Nell says, he is "geared ridiculously low"; and having such a short nose and stick out lower jaw, when he wants to eat or smell things, he has practically to stand on his head; also he can never see anything that goes on under his chin. She says, too, that when he's troubled, and a lot of lines meet together at one point in the middle of his forehead, his face looks exactly like Clapham Junction; and so it does. Nevertheless, he's beautiful, and has the sort of features Old Masters gave dogs in pictures, features more like those of people than animals, and a human expression in the eyes.

It is odd, Nell and I used to tell each other every thought

I was glad to stoop down and pat Tibe

we had, and we talked over all the people we knew; but now, though I think a good deal about Jonkheer Brederode, and wonder how he really does feel toward us both, I never speak about him to Nell when I can avoid it, and she never mentions his name to me.

I don't know what happened to make her suddenly nice to him at Amsterdam, but something did, and she is nice still, only her manner is different somehow. I can hardly tell what the difference is, but it is there. At first, when we went to Spaakenberg and the other places, before Lady MacNairne said that thing, she was agreeable to the Jonkheer in a brilliant, bewitching, coquettish sort of way, as though she wished after all to attract him. But since that evening at the Hotel Spaander, in Volendam, she has been quite subdued. Jonkheer Brederode is quiet and rather distant, too, and sometimes I think he speaks to Nell coldly, as if he distrusted such shy signs of friendliness as she still shows.

Now, it seems to me that he and Mr. van Buren and Mr. Starr are three friends worth having, not just the accidental sort of friends ("friendines" Nell calls that kind) who happen to be your friends because you were thrown with them somewhere, and you would not miss them dreadfully if by-and-by you drifted apart. They seem ones you were *destined* to meet, just as much as you are destined to be born, and to die; friends intended to be in your life and never go out of it. I scarcely knew in the beginning of our acquaintance which of the three I liked best; and now that I *do* know, I'm equally nice to them all, because one should do as one would be done by, and I love to have people nice to me.

Mr. van Buren has been with us the last two days, and I can see that he watches his friend and me, if we chance to be together. I should like to know if he, too, has the idea that Jonkheer Brederode cares about me, and, if so, whether he wonders how it's possible for any man to admire me more than

Nell, who is so beautiful and brilliant and amusing? I can't help being flattered that such an interesting person as the Jonkheer *should* like my society better than Nell's, though I can hardly believe it's true. But somehow it would be nice to have Mr. van Buren believe it, as then he would be obliged to think me quite a fascinating girl, even though it probably wouldn't have occurred to him before — being engaged and so on — to regard me in that light of his own accord.

I should love to talk to Nell about all this in the sweet old way we used to have, and I do miss a *confidante*. Lady MacNairne is a most wonderful little woman, who manages every one of us, and we would do anything to please her; yet I should never dream of confiding in her. I don't know why, unless it's because she's all blue spectacles and gray hair. And if you never can see what people are thinking about behind their glasses, whether they're sighing over your troubles or laughing, how can you tell them sacred things about yourself?

Sometimes I think it a pity that Mr. Starr is a man. If only he were a girl he would be the most delightful person to have for a confidant. In spite of his impish moods, which make him seem often like an "elfin boy," as Jonkheer Brederode says, he's extraordinarily sympathetic. I feel that he understands Nell and me thoroughly, and as he is good to look at, and clever and fascinating in his manner when he chooses, I wonder why neither of us has fallen in love with him. But very likely Nell has. If she hasn't she has been flirting with him horribly.

XXII

IT was like finding an old friend to see Mr. van Buren waiting to meet us at quaint little Volendam. He explained that Freule Menela had gone to Brussels to pay a visit; so, hearing from me when we would arrive, he ran out to inquire how his cousin was getting on. When his fiancée came back, he said, he would bring her and his sisters to see us.

Our first sight of Volendam was at sunset. Everything seemed so beautiful, and I felt so happy walking up to the hotel where we were to spend the night, that I should have liked to sing. Great clouds had boiled up out of the west; but underneath, a wonderful, almost supernatural light streamed over the sea. The sky was indigo, and the water a sullen lead color; but along the horizon blazed a belt of gold, and the sails on a fleet of fishing-boats were scarlet, like a bed of red geraniums blooming in the sea.

It was in this strange light that we walked from the harbor up the main street of the village, which is a long dyke of black Norwegian granite, protecting little pointed-roofed houses, the lower stories of a sober color, the upper ones with the peaked gables pea-green or blue, and the sabots of the family lying on the door-steps. Here and there in a window were a few bits of gaudy china for sale, or a sabot over a door as the sign of a shoe-shop; but we hardly looked at the houses, so interesting were their inmates, who seemed to be all in the street.

Along the dyke squatted a double row of men, old and young — mostly old; but all as brown as if they had been

carved out of oak. Every one had a tight-fitting jersey and enormously baggy trousers, like those other men round the corner of the Zuider Zee at Marken. But at Marken the jerseys were dark and here of the most wonderful crimson; the new ones the shade of a Jacqueminot rose, the faded ones like the lovely roses which Nell calls "American beauties."

There they sat, tailor-fashion, with their legs crossed and their cloth or fur caps tilted over their eyes as they smoked (very handsome, bold eyes, some of them!) and, passing up and down, up and down in front of the row as if in review, with a musical clatter of sabots, bands of women, lovely girls, and charming little buttons of children.

Nell and I admired the costumes more than at Marken, though they're not as striking, only innocently pretty. But I can't imagine anything more becoming than the transparent white caps that fold back and flare out over the ears like a soaring bird's wings. Perhaps it was partly the effect of the light, but the young girls in their straight dark bodices, with flowered handkerchief-chemisettes, full blue skirts — pieced with pale-tinted stuff from waist to hips — and those flying, winged caps, looked angelic.

They walked with their arms round each other's waists, or else they knitted with gleaming needles. Quite toddling creatures had blue yokes over their shoulders, and carried splashing pails of water as big as themselves, or they had round tots of babies tucked under their arms. But whatever they were doing — men, women, girls, boys, and babies — all stopped doing it instantly when they spied Tibe. I don't believe they knew he was a dog; and though he has invariably had a *succés fou* wherever we have been, I never saw people so mad about him as at Volendam.

The Jonkheer says there are nearly three thousand inhabitants, and half of them were after Tibe on the dyke as we walked toward the hotel. The news of him seemed to fly, as

they say tidings travel through the Indian bazaars. Faces appeared in windows; then quaint figures popped out of doors, and Tibe was actually mobbed. A procession trailed after him, shouting, laughing, calling.

Tibe was flattered at first, and preened himself for admiration; but presently he became worried, then disgusted, and ran before the storm of voices and wooden shoes. We were all glad to get him into the hotel.

Such a quaint hotel, with incredibly neat, box-like rooms, whose varnished, green wooden walls you could use for mirrors. I didn't know that it was famous, but it seems that it is; also the landlord and his many daughters. Every artist who has ever come to Volendam has painted a picture for the big room which you enter as you walk in from the street, and I saw half a dozen which I should love to own.

It was fun dining out-of-doors on a big, covered balcony looking over the Zuider Zee, and seeing the horizon populous with fishing-boats. In the falling dusk they looked like the flitting figures of tall, graceful ladies moving together hand in hand, with flowing skirts; some in gossiping knots, others hovering proudly apart in pairs like princesses.

It is wonderful how our chaperon makes friends with people, and gets them to do as she likes. If she were young and pretty it wouldn't be strange — at least, where men are concerned; but though her complexion (what one can see of it) looks fresh, if pale, and she has no hollows or wrinkles, her hair is gray, and she wears blue spectacles, with only a bit of face really visible. One hardly knows what she does look like. Nevertheless, the men of our party are her slaves; and it is the same at hotels. If at first landlords say Tibe can't live in the house, the next minute, when she has wheedled a little, they are patting his head, calling him "good dog," and telling his mistress that they will make an exception in his case.

The morning after we arrived in Volendam I got up early, because Mr. van Buren offered to show me the place if I cared to take a walk. It was only half-past eight when we strolled out of the hotel, and the first person I met was Lady MacNairne. She had been walking, and was on her way back, looking like the Old Woman in the Shoe, surrounded by children of all sizes. She had made friends with them, and taken their photographs, and their grown-up sisters had told her lots of things about Volendam.

She had found out that as soon as the fisherfolk's sons begin to dress like boys, they are given their buckles and neck-buttons: the gold or silver knobs which are different for each fishing-village of Holland; so that, if a man is found drowned, you can tell where he comes from by his buttons.

She had learned that the trousers are baggy, because in storms the men don't get as wet as in tight ones. That the women wear eight petticoats, not only because it's "the mode," but because it's considered beautiful for a girl to look stout; and besides, it's not thought modest to show how you are shaped.

Another thing she learned was that, just as the boys must have their buckles and buttons (and ear-rings, if they can get them), each Volendam girl, if she wishes to be anybody, must have a coral necklace with a gold cross; several silver rings; a silver buckle for her purse; and a scent-bottle with a silver top and foot. No girl could hope to marry well, Lady MacNairne said, without these things; and as the ones who told her had no rings or scent-bottles in their collections, she would get her nephew to buy them. It wouldn't do for him to make the presents himself, as the girls were proud, though their fathers earned only five gulden a week; but she would give them, and then it would be all right. One of the girls was unhappy, as she was in love with a young fisherman, and they were too poor to marry, so she expected to go to Rotterdam as a nursemaid.

"It seems," said Lady MacNairne, "that Volendam girls are in demand all over Holland, as nurses; they're so good to children and animals. But this one won't have to go, for dear Ronny must supply her *dot.*"

"Have you asked him?" I inquired.

She laughed. "No," said she. "He'll do it, though, to please me, I know."

These things were not all she had found out. She knew that Volendam had first been made famous twenty or thirty years ago by an artist named Clausen, who came by accident and went away to tell all his friends. She knew how the Hotel Spaander had been started to please the artists, and how it had grown year by year; and all the things that people told her she had written in a note-book which she wears dangling from a chatelaine. It does seem odd for a Scotswoman, and one of her rank, to be so keen about every detail of travel, that she must scribble it down in a book, in a frantic hurry. But then, many things about Lady MacNairne *are* odd.

The sun was blazing that morning, but a wind had come up in the night, and beaten the waves into froth. The dark sea-line stretched unevenly along the horizon, and there were no fishing-boats to be seen. All were snugly nestled in harbor, with their gay pennants just visible over the pointed roofs of the houses; and we had an exciting breakfast on the balcony, because, though it wasn't cold, the tablecloths and napkins flapped wildly in the wind, like big white rings of frightened swans.

Jonkheer Brederode had planned to go northward, skirting the coast to see two more Dead Cities of the Zuider Zee, Hoorn and Enkhuisen, and cut across the sea to Stavoren on the other side, to enter the Frisian Meers. But now he refused to take us that way. The men might go, if they liked, he said, and there really wasn't much danger; but in such rough weather he couldn't allow women to run the risk in "Lorelei."

"But it wouldn't be in 'Lorelei,' Lady MacNairne put in. 'Lorelei' has ceased to exist."

Nell grew pink and I think I grew pale. It was an awful shock to hear her speak so calmly about the loss of our dear boat, of which we have grown so fond.

"Ceased to exist!" I repeated, cold all over. "Has she *gone under?*"

"Only under a coat of paint," said Mr. Starr, hurriedly. "You know, Miss Van Buren consented to humor my aunt, who thought the name unlucky, by rechristening the boat Mascotte,' so I did it myself, this morning, the first thing, before there were many people about to get in my way."

"I'd forgotten," said Nell. "But if she's 'Mascotte' now, isn't that a sign she could take us safely through the sea? They're only miniature waves."

"You wouldn't think so if you were in their midst in a motor-boat," said the Jonkheer.

"I'm ready to try," Nell answered.

"But I'm not ready to let you," he said, with one of his nice smiles.

However, this didn't conciliate Nell. In an instant she bristled up, as she used to with him, before Amsterdam.

"It's my boat," she said.

"But I'm the boat's skipper. The skipper must act according to his judgment. Joking apart though ——"

"I'm *not* joking. If men can go, why can't women? We're not afraid. It would be fun."

"Not for the men, if they had women to think of. You see, the boat is top-heavy, owing to the cabin superstructure, and it wouldn't be impossible for her to turn turtle in a heavy sea. Besides, rough waves might break the cabin windows, and if she began to take in water in that way, we should be done, for no bailing could help us. Do you still want to make the trip, Miss Van Buren?"

"I do," Nell insisted. "Because I don't believe those things will happen."

"Neither do I, or I shouldn't care to risk your boat. But there's a chance."

"I shouldn't dream of venturing," said Lady MacNairne, "and I'm sure Phyllis wouldn't go without her chaperon, would you, dear?"

"No," I answered; and that mercifully settled it for Nell, as she couldn't take a trip alone with the men.

"In any case, it's pleasanter to drive from here to Hoorn and Enkhuisen," went on the Jonkheer, "and the only real reason for sticking to the boat even in fine weather would have been that you came to 'do' Holland in a motor-boat, and wanted to be true to your principles. The coast is flat and low, and you'd have seen nothing except a line of land which would have looked uninteresting across the water, whereas in my car ——"

"But your car isn't here," objected Nell.

"It may be, any minute now. I've been expecting it for the last hour. I wasn't trusting entirely to luck, when we came; and my chauffeur had orders to hold himself in readiness for a telegram. Last night, as soon as I saw the wind getting up, I wired him in Amsterdam, where he was waiting, to start as soon as it was light."

"You're a wonderful fellow," said Mr. van Buren, and I complimented him too; but Nell didn't speak.

A few minutes later we heard the whirr of a motor, and the buzz of excited voices. We had just finished breakfast, so we rushed from the balcony at the back of the house, through the big room of the pictures, to the front door; and there was Jonkheer Brederode's car (on the dyke, which is the only road), with the smart little chauffeur smiling and touching his cap to his master, amid a swarm of girls and boys.

By-and-by it was decided that only Jonkheer Brederode

and Hendrik (with Toon on the barge) should test the motor-boat's seaworthy qualities, while Mr. van Buren and Mr. Starr stopped with us. This was the Jonkheer's idea. He would prefer it, he said, as the fewer there were on "Lorelei" — alias "Mascotte" — the better. And Mr. van Buren ought to be with us, to tell us about places.

I think all the men would have liked the adventure, but they couldn't say that they didn't want to be of our party, and Lady MacNairne actually begged her nephew to come in the motor. She didn't confess that she was afraid for him. The reason she gave was that she couldn't take care of Tibe in the car without his help. I was sure she was anxious. Though I couldn't help being glad for his family's sake that Mr. van Buren was safe (as safe as any one can be in a motor-car) it did seem sad that Jonkheer Brederode was left to brave the danger without his friends.

All Lady MacNairne's thought was for her nephew, and so I felt it would be only kind to show the Jonkheer that some one cared about *him*. I begged him to let Hendrik manage the boat alone, for I said we should all be so worried, that it would spoil our drive. I supposed Nell would join with me, as Lady MacNairne did, if only enough for civility, but she wouldn't say a word. However, though she pretended to be more interested in examining the car than listening to our conversation, she was pale, with the air of having a headache.

Jonkheer Brederode was pleased, I think, to feel that some one took an interest in him; but he made light of the danger, and saw us off so merrily that I forgot to worry.

Mr. van Buren didn't want to drive; Mr. Starr doesn't know how; and as Nell said she would like to sit in front with the chauffeur, Lady MacNairne and I had the two men in the *tonneau* with us.

We were gay; but Nell didn't turn round once to join in our talk. She sat there beside the chauffeur, as glum as if she

had lost her last friend. Perhaps she was alarmed for her boat, as she doesn't care about the Jonkheer.

Now we began to see what a Dutch dyke really is, and I could imagine men riding furiously along the high, narrow road, carrying the news to village after village that the water was rising.

There was just room on top for anything we might meet to pass; but the chauffeur drove slowly, and Mr. van Buren said there was no danger, so I wasn't afraid. There was a sense of protection in sitting next to him, he is so big and dependable. I felt he would not *let* anything hurt me; and once in a while he looked at me with a very nice look. I suppose he has even nicer ones for Freule Menela, though, when they are alone together. It is a pity her manner is so much against her.

Although I wasn't terrified, it was an exciting drive, running along on the high dyke (I could hardly believe it when Mr. van Buren said there were bigger ones in Zeeland), with the Zuider Zee on one side and the wide green reaches of Jonkheer Brederode's Hollow Land on the other.

I shivered to think what would happen if the hungry sea, forever gnawing at the granite pile, were to break it down and pour over the low-lying land. Many times in the past such awful things happened; what if to-day were the day for it to happen again?

I asked Mr. van Buren if he didn't wake up sometimes in the night with an attack of the horrors; but he seemed anxious to soothe me, as if he didn't want his country spoiled for me by fears.

"The corps of engineers who look after the coast defenses is the best in the world," he said.

Edam was our first town; and it was odd to see it, after nibbling its cheeses more or less all one's life, and never thinking of the place they came from. The funniest thing was that it smelled of cheese — a delicious smell that seemed a part of

the town's tranquillity, just as the perfume seems part of a flower. In most of the pretty old houses with their glittering ornamental tiles, there was some sign of cheese-making; and all the people of Edam must have been busy making it, as we saw only two or three.

We stopped in a large public square, with a pattern in the colored pavement, like carpet, and the place was so quiet that the sound of the silence droned in our ears.

"And this," said Mr. van Buren, "was once one of the proudest cities of the Zuider Zee!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Lady MacNairne, "is this little old thing another of the Dead Cities? Well, I'm sure it couldn't have been half as nice when it was alive." And down something went in her note-book.

We drove by a park, a noble church, and the loveliest cemetery I ever saw, not at all sad. I could not think of the dead there, but only of children playing and lovers strolling under the trees.

As soon as we were outside Edam we began to pass windmills quite different from any we had seen before. They were just like stout Dutch ladies, smartly dressed in green, with coats and bonnets of gray thatch and greenish veils over their faces, half hiding the big eyes which gazed alway toward the dyke that imprisons the Zuider Zee.

We had been off the dyke and skimming along an ordinary Dutch road for a while; but presently we swerved toward the right and were again on a dyke sloping toward the sea. Sailing along its level top we could see far off the embowered roofs and spires of a town which Mr. van Buren said was the once powerful city of Hoorn.

"Isn't there a Cape somewhere named after it?" asked Lady MacNairne gaily; and Mr. van Buren (answering that William Schouten, the sailor who discovered the Cape, named it after his native town) looked surprised at her ignorance.

She doesn't seem to know much about history, but she will know a great deal about Holland before we finish this trip if she goes on as she is going now.

In ten minutes we were in the suburbs; in five more we were in the Dead City itself; but it had the air of having been resurrected and being delighted to find itself alive again. We passed row upon row of wonderful carts, shaped like the cars of classical goddesses, though no self-respecting goddess would have her car painted green outside and blue or scarlet within.

"By Jove, now I know why Brederode was so keen on our getting off early and not waiting at Volendam till to-morrow for the wind to die!" exclaimed Mr. van Buren. "What a fellow he is to think of everything! This is the one and only time to find Hoorn at its best — market-day. And now you will see some nice things."

He had the chauffeur slow down the car in a fascinating street, with quaint houses leaning back or sidewise, and bearing themselves as they pleased.

"Which way for the cheese market?" Mr. van Buren asked an old man with a wreath of white fur under his chin.

He asked in Dutch, but so many Dutch words sound like caricatures of English ones that I begin to understand now. Besides, I have bought a grammar and study it in the evenings. This pleased Mr. van Buren when I told him, and he says I have made splendid progress. I've got as far as "I love, you love, he loves," and so on. I think Dutch an extremely interesting language.

The old man told us which way to go, and turning up a street we should never have thought of, we came out in a huge market-place presided over by a statue of Coen, a man who founded the Dutch dominion in the West Indies, or something which Mr. van Buren thought important.

We have often wondered where the people of the towns hide themselves; but there was no such puzzle in Hoorn.

The market-place looked as if half the population of North Holland might be there. The whole of the square was covered with cheeses, large shiny cheeses, yellow as monstrous oranges. They glittered so radiantly in the sunlight that you felt they might at any instant burst out into a flame. Between the great glowing mounds little paths had been left, and along these paths walked lines of solemn men inspecting the burning globes and bargaining with their possessors; while outside the huge, cheese-paved space there was a moving crowd, gay and shifting as the figures made by bits of colored glass in a kaleidoscope.

We expected to create a sensation with the motor, but the cheeses were more interesting, and nobody had time for more than a glance at us. Suddenly, as we sat gazing at the scene, affairs in the market-place came to some kind of crisis. A stream of men appeared, dressed in spotless white from head to foot, and wearing varnished, hard straw hats of different colors. Soon, we saw it was the hats which determined everything. The blue-hatted men walked together; the red hats formed another party; the yellow hats a third; and so on. Each corps carried large yet shallow trays suspended from their shoulders — two men to a tray — and falling upon the piles of cheeses they gathered them up with incredible quickness. Then, when the trays were loaded with a pyramid of cheeses, off rushed the men to a wonderful Weigh House which Mr. van Buren says is famous throughout all North Holland. Inside were many men, busy as bees, weighing cheeses with enormous scales. Down dropped the trays; the weight was taken, and away darted the men bearing the yellow treasures to some neighboring warehouse.

We watched the weighing for a long time, until we were so hungry that we could feel no enthusiasm for anything except lunch. But as we drove through crowded streets to a hotel, it was interesting to pass warehouses where cheeses were being

Solemn men inspecting burning globes, and bargaining with their possessors

stored. The porters with the bright hats (worn to denote their ancient guilds) were standing on the pavement tossing up cheeses, like conjurors keeping a lot of oranges in the air. Men above, standing in open lofts, caught the golden balls as they flew up, and stored them among crowds of others that seemed to illuminate the dim background like half-extinguished lanterns glowing in the dark.

We lunched at an old-fashioned hotel with enormous rooms; and then, as we had time, we wound through the chief streets of the Dead City, stopping now and then to study *bas-reliefs* on ancient houses, telling of stirring events when the name of Hoorn sounded loud in the world.

There was one stone picture of many old ships in commotion among impossible waves, and the description was all in one word —"Bossuzeeslag." It seemed very impressive to sit staring up at it while Mr. van Buren told how "we" whipped the Spanish ship "Inquisition" after thirty hours' fighting on the sand-bank, and all the people of Hoorn assembled to look on.

After seeing the house where Graaf Bossu was kept prisoner our interest in the Hoorn of long ago was kindled to a blaze. Mr. van Buren proposed taking us to the Museum, so we all went, except poor Mr. Starr, who sat in front of the handsome building in the motor-car, on "dog duty," as he calls it.

I liked the reproduction of an old Dutch inn, and the plans of the Dead Cities as they used to be; but the paintings of determined-looking burgomasters in black with ruffles and conical hats, were pathetic. The men in their short frilled trousers and high boots, thought themselves so important, poor dears, with their piteous forefingers proudly pointing to maps and specifications, that it was sad to see them still doing it when all their plans had come to nothing long ago. We admired Hoorn as it is, but it would break their hearts if they could see it, given up to cheese, and only of importance in the cheese world.

We were not in the Museum long, but Mr. Starr had suffered tortures meanwhile, and looked ten years older when we came out. Tibe had been asleep on the floor of the *tonneau* while we were in the market-place before lunch, so nobody had seen him. But, deserted by his mistress, he sat up in the car to look for her, and the passers-by caught sight of him. Word went round that there was a strange monster, a cross between a monkey and a goblin, sitting in an automobile, and all the people of Hoorn poured into the street to see the show, just as they had poured to the harbor more than three hundred years ago when the "zeelsag" was going on.

We came out to find the car almost lost to sight in the crush; but Mr. van Buren, who is like a great, handsome Viking, pushed the people aside, and said things to them in Dutch which made some laugh and others grumble.

To escape, we drove out of the town into toy-like suburbs, with little streets, and tiny houses on dykes, each one with its drawbridge across the stream running on either side a dyke-road. And now we seemed to be in the heart of toyland. It was like a place built by Santa Claus, to come to at Christmas time, and choose presents to fill his pack.

Aalsmeer and Broek-in-Waterland, which we had thought toy-like, were grown-up villages for grown-up people compared to this toy-world.

On we went, penetrating further into the doll-country, instead of running out of it. The brown, yellow, green, and red carts, ornamented with festoons of flowers in carved wood, which were returning from market, were the only grown-up things we saw — except the trees, and they seemed abnormally tall by way of contrast.

Mile after mile, the road to Enkhuisen led on between two lines of dolls' houses and gardens. Some must have been meant for very large dolls, but that made no difference in the toy effect, as the great farmhouses, apportioned off half for

toy animals, half for farmer-dolls, were just as fantastic in design and decoration as the tiny ones.

Backgrounds of meadows, canals, and windmills, I suppose there must have been, as every picture has to have its background; but backgrounds are seldom obtrusive in Holland, as Mr. Starr says; and here the two lines of toy dwellings were so astonishing that we noted nothing else.

For the whole ten miles of the drive we were playing dolls. The long, straight string of houses was knotted now and then into the semblance of a village, but never was the string broken between Hoorn and Enkhuisen, and though we saw so many, each new doll-house made us laugh as if it were the first.

I tried not to laugh at the beginning, lest it might hurt Mr. van Buren's feelings; but he didn't mind, and pointed out the funniest front doors, crusted with colored flowers, like the icing on a child's birthday cake sprinkled with "hundreds of thousands." After that, I laughed as much as I liked at everything, though I was sure the people who had built the houses took them quite seriously, and admired them beyond words. You felt that each man had put his whole soul into the scheme of his house, trying to outdo his neighbors in color or originality.

There would be a house with a red-brick front for the lower story, and the upper one, including gables, done in wood painted pea-green. Then the sides of the house would be in green and white stripes, the window-frames sky-blue, the tiny sparkling panes twinkling out like diamonds set in turquoises. But these would not be the only colors to dazzle your eyes as you flashed through the tall Gothic archway of trees darkening the road. There would be a three-foot deep band of ultramarine distemper running all round a house, the trunks of the trees and the fence would be brilliantly blue, and despite a dash of scarlet here and there, as you approached you had the impression of coming to a lake of azure water.

Further on would be another house, yellow and scarlet and white, having a door like a mosaic with raised patterns of flowers in pink, blue, and purple on a background of gold or black; and the high, pointed roof, half thatched, half covered with glittering black tiles.

These roofs made the houses look as if they had bald, shiny foreheads, with thick hair on top, and gave the windows a curiously wise expression.

But if the homesteads (with their additions for families of horses and cows) were extraordinary, they were commonplace compared with the chicken or pigeon-houses, shaped like châteaux, or Chinese pagodas, wreathed with flowers.

When at last we drove under a gateway across the road, and the color was suddenly extinguished as if a show of fireworks were over, we all felt as though we had come back to the everyday world after an excursion into elfland.

It was the entrance to Enkhuisen, the last of the Dead Cities which we were to visit — a strange, sad old town, with a charming park, churches three times too big for it, and beautiful seventeenth-century houses, small but perfect as cameos. We drove to the harbor, not only to see the wonderful humpbacked Dromedary Tower, but to find out whether there were any news of our boat, before going to the hotel.

A stiff wind was blowing; the sea was gray, and waves tossed angrily against the breakwater.

Nothing had been heard of "Lorelei-Mascotte," and though we left the car and walked to the outer harbor, straining our eyes in the direction whence she should come, no craft resembling her was in sight.

The beauty of the day had died; sky and water were dull as lead, and Nell's face, as she stood gazing out to sea, looked pallid in the bleak light.

Suddenly we felt depressed, though Mr. van Buren said it was hardly time to expect news. As we lingered, the most

exquisite music began to fall over our heads, apparently from the sky, like a shower of jewels.

"The chimes of the Dromedary," said Mr. van Buren, looking up at the strong, dark tower looming above us. Our eyes followed his, and the music sprayed over us in a lovely fountain. Had the bells been all of silver, rung by fairies, the notes could not have been sweeter. In itself the air was not sad, yet it pierced to the heart; and as the chimes played I found that I was a great deal more anxious about Jonkheer Brederode than I had thought. The tears came to my eyes, and when Lady MacNairne asked what was the matter, I said impulsively that I couldn't help being frightened for our friend, doing his self-imposed duty so bravely by Nell's boat.

Going back to the hotel, we were all miserable. Even Mr. van Buren seemed wretched, though I can't think why, as he said he was not anxious about the Jonkheer. And Lady MacNairne forgot to put it down in her note-book when some one told her that Enkhuisen was the birthplace of Paul Potter.

XXIII

I SHALL never forget that night at Enkhuisen, or the hotel.

Mr. Starr said it was no wonder Cities of the Zuider Zee died, if they were brought up on hotels like that.

Ours, apparently, had no one to attend to it, except one frightened rabbit of a boy, who appeared to be manager, hall porter, waiter, boots, and chambermaid in one; but when we had scrambled up a ladder-like stairway — it was almost as difficult as climbing a greased pole — we found decent rooms, and after that, things we wanted came by some mysterious means, we knew not how.

It was an adventure sliding down to dinner. Tibe fell from top to bottom, into a kind of black well, and upset Lady MacNairne completely. She said she hated Enkhuisen, and she thought it a dispensation of Providence that the sand had come and silted it up.

We had quite good things for dinner, but we ate in a dining-room with no fresh air, because the commercial travelers who sat at the same table, with napkins tucked under their chins, refused to have the windows open. Mr. van Buren wanted to defy them, but his chin looked so square, and the commercial travelers' eyes got so prominent, that I begged to have the windows left as they were.

There are churches to see in Enkhuisen, and a beautiful choir screen, but we hadn't the heart to visit them. We said perhaps we would go to-morrow, and added in our minds, "if the boat is safely in."

The Rabbit hardly knew what we meant when we asked for

a private sitting-room, and evidently thought it far from a proper request.

To add to our melancholy, a thunder-storm came up after dinner, and lightning looped like coils of silver ribbon across the sky and back again, while thunder deadened the chimes of the Dromedary. Still there was no news, and at last Mr. van Buren went out in torrents of rain to the harbor.

We could not bear to sit in the dining-room where the commercial travelers — in carpet slippers — were smoking and discussing Dutch politics, so we clambered up the greased pole to Lady MacNairne's room, and talked about Philip the Second, and tortures, while Tibe growled at the thunder, and looked for it under furniture and in corners.

Nell was in such a black mood that she would have liked Philip to be tortured through all eternity, because of the horrible suffering he inflicted on the people of Holland; but I said the worst punishment would be for his soul to have been purified at death, that he might suddenly realize the fiendishness of his own crimes, see himself as he really was, and go on repenting throughout endless years.

It was not an enlivening conversation, and in the midst Mr. van Buren came to say that there were no tidings of Jonkheer Brederode and the boat.

Then Nell jumped up, very white, with shining eyes. "Can't we do something?" she asked.

Her cousin shook his head. "What is there we can do? Nothing! We must wait and hope that all is well."

"Are you anxious now?" asked Lady MacNairne.

"A little," he admitted.

"I don't know how to bear it," exclaimed Nell, with a choke in her voice.

I longed to comfort her; but her wretchedness seemed only to harden her cousin's heart.

He looked at her angrily. "It is late for you to worry," he

reproached her. "If you had shown concern for Rudolph's safety this morning it would have been gracious; but ——"

"Don't!" she said.

Just the one word, and not crossly, but in such a voice of appeal that he didn't finish his sentence.

We sat about awkwardly, and tried to speak of other things, but the talk would drift to our fears for the boat. Nell did not join in. She sat by the window, looking out and listening to the rain and wind, which made a sound like the purring of a great cat.

Ten o'clock came, and Lady MacNairne proposed that, as we could do nothing, we women should go to bed.

Then Nell spoke. "No," she said. "You and Phil can do as you like, and Cousin Robert and Mr. Starr; but I shall sit up."

Of course I told her I would sit up, too; and as Mr. van Buren said the commercial travelers had left the dining-room, he and Mr. Starr and Nell and I bade Lady MacNairne good-night, and went down.

The unfortunate Rabbit was in the act of putting out the light, but he was obliged to leave it for us, a necessity which distressed him.

By-and-by it was eleven, and the hotel was as silent as a hotel in a Dead City ought to be. We talked spasmodically. Sometimes we were still for many minutes, listening for sounds outside; and we could hear the scampering of mice behind the walls.

"I can't stand this," said Nell. "I'm going to the harbor."

"I will take you," replied Mr. van Buren.

"No, thank you," said Nell. "I'd rather you stopped with Phil. She has a cold, and mustn't get wet."

"May I go?" asked Mr. Starr.

"Yes," she said.

So they stole away through the sleeping house, and presently

we heard the front door close. Mr. van Buren and I were alone together.

He was good about cheering me up, saying he had too much faith in his friend's courage and skill as a yachtsman to be very anxious, though the delay was odd.

Then, suddenly he broke out with a strange question.

"Would it hurt you if anything should happen to Rudolph Brederode?"

I was so surprised that I could hardly answer at first. Then I said that of course it would hurt me, for I liked and admired the Jonkheer, and considered him my friend.

"I have no right to ask," he went on, "but I do beg you to say if it is only as a friend you like Rudolph."

That startled me, for I was afraid things I had done might have been misunderstood, owing to the difference of ways in Holland.

"Why," I stammered, "are you going to warn me not to care for him, because he doesn't care for me? How *dreadful!*"

Nell's cousin Robert looked so pale, I was afraid he must be ill. He put up his hand and pushed his hair back from his forehead, and then began pacing about the room.

"Rudolph *must* care — he *shall* care, if you wish it," he said.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "I didn't mean it was dreadful if he didn't care; but if you thought *I* did."

He stopped walking and took one big step that brought him to me.

"You do not?"

"Of course not," said I; "not in *that* way."

Mr. van Buren caught both my hands, and pressed them so tightly, that I couldn't help giving a tiny squeak.

"Ah, I have hurt you!" he cried, and a strange expression came into his eyes. At least, it was strange that it should be for me, instead of Freule Menela, for it was almost — but no,

I must have been mistaken, of course, in thinking it was like that. Anyway, it was a thrilling expression, and made my heart beat as fast as if I were frightened, though I think that wasn't exactly the feeling. I couldn't take my eyes away from his for a minute. We looked straight at each other; then, as if he couldn't resist, he kissed my hands one after the other — not with polite little Dutch kisses, but eager and desperate. As he did it, he gave a kind of groan, and before I could speak he muttered, "Forgive me!" as he rushed out of the room.

He must have almost run against Mr. Starr, for the next instant the "Mariner" (as Jonkheer Brederode calls him) came in, dripping wet.

There was I, all pink and trembling, and my voice did sound odd as I quavered out, "Where's Nell?"

"Gone to her room," said Mr. Starr, looking hard at me with his brilliant, whimsical eyes. "I was to tell you ——"

With that, I burst into tears.

"Good gracious, poor angel! What is the matter?" he exclaimed, coming closer.

"I don't know," I sobbed. "But I'm not an angel. I do believe I'm a very — *wicked* girl."

"You, wicked? Why?"

"Because — I've got feelings I oughtn't to have."

"And that's why you're crying?"

"I'm not sure. But I just — can't help it."

"I wish I could do something," said he, quite miserably; and I could smell the wet serge of his sopping coat, though I couldn't see him, for my hands were over my eyes. I was ashamed of myself, but not as much ashamed as I would have been with any one else, because of the feeling I have that Mr. Starr would be so wonderfully nice and sympathetic to confide in. Not that I have anything to confide.

"Thank you, but you couldn't. Nobody could," I moaned.

"Not even Miss Van Buren?"

"Not now. It's too sad. Something seems to have come between us; I don't know what."

"Maybe that's making you cry?"

"No, I don't think so. Oh, I'm *so* unhappy!"

"You poor little dove! You don't mind my calling you that, do you?"

I shook my head. "No, it comforts me. It's so soothing after — after ——"

"After what? Has anybody been beast enough ——"

"Nobody's been a beast," I hurried to break in, "except, perhaps, *me*."

"Do tell me what's troubling you," he begged, and pulled my hands down from my face, not in the way Mr. van Buren had caught them, but very gently. I let him lead me to a sofa and dry my eyes with his handkerchief, because it seemed exactly like having a brother. It was just as nice to be sympathized with by him as I had often imagined it would be, and I liked it so much that I selfishly forgot he was soaked with rain, and ought to get out of his wet clothes.

"If I knew I would tell you," I said.

"You're worried about Alb — I mean Brederode?"

"Oh, now I *know* I'm a beast! I'd forgotten to ask about him, or the boats."

"You'd forgotten — by Jove! No, nothing heard or seen yet. I made Miss Van Buren come back at last. Had to say I was afraid of catching cold or she'd be there now. But see here, as it isn't Alb's fate that's bothering you, may I make a guess?"

"Yes, because you never could guess," said I.

"Is it — anything about van Buren?"

My face felt as if it was on fire. "Why, what *should* it be?" I asked.

"It might be, for instance, that you're sorry for him

because he's engaged to a brute of a girl who's sure to make him miserable. You've got such a tender heart."

"You're partly right," I confessed. "Not that he's been complaining. He wouldn't do such a thing."

"No, of course not," said Mr. Starr.

"It's wonderful how that should have come into your mind," I said. "Please don't think me stupid to cry, but suddenly it came over me — such agonizing pity for him. I can't think he loves her."

"I'm sure he doesn't. I always wondered how he could, but to-night I saw that his engagement was making him wretched."

"You *saw* that?"

"Yes."

"You're so sympathetic," I couldn't help saying.

"Am I?"

"Yes. Do you know, I feel almost as if you were my brother?"

"Oh, that settles it! It's all up with me."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Whichever way I look I find nothing but sisters. I've had to promise myself to be a brother to Miss Van Buren, too, to-night."

"Don't you mean you promised her?"

"No, for I haven't done that yet. But it will probably come later."

"Would you rather not be our brother?" I hope I didn't speak reproachfully.

"We — ell, my first idea was that an aunt was the only relative I should have with me on this trip. Still, I'd have been delighted to be a brother to one of you, if I could only have kept the other up my sleeve, as you might say, to be useful in a different capacity."

"You love to puzzle me," I said.

"There are lots of things I love about you — as a brother," he answered with a funny sigh. And I wasn't sure whether he was poking fun at me or not. "But, as for Miss Van Buren, why couldn't she look upon van Buren as a brother?"

"He's her cousin, and she doesn't love him much," I explained.

"Alb, then."

"She doesn't love him at all."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Oh, certain," I assured him quite earnestly.

"She's sick with anxiety about him anyhow. I had to comfort her."

"That's because she feels guilty for being so disagreeable," I said; "and she would of course suffer dreadful remorse, poor girl, if he were drowned looking after her boat, as I pray he won't be."

I began to understand now. Poor Mr. Starr was jealous of his friend, the Jonkheer.

"Well, I wish she'd love me a little, then, as there's nobody else."

"Do you know, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she *does*," I almost whispered. "Perhaps that's what's making her so queer."

"I wish I could think so," sighed Mr. Starr. But he didn't look as radiant as one might have expected. He seemed more startled that delighted. "Anyhow," he went on, "you're a dove-hearted angel, and it's all fixed up that I'm to be a brother to you, whatever other relationships I may be engaged in. I must try and get to work, and earn my salt by making you happy."

"I don't feel to-night as if I could ever be happy again," I told him. "The world seems such a sad place to be in."

"I'll see what I can do, anyhow," said he. "Would it make you happier if van Buren were happier?"

"Oh yes," I exclaimed. "He's been so kind to Nell and me. But I'm afraid nothing can be done. An unfortunate marriage for a young man of — of an affectionate nature is such a tragedy, isn't it?"

"Awful. But it may never came off."

"I don't see what's to prevent it," I said. And the memory of that last look on Mr. van Buren's face came up so vividly that tears stood in my eyes.

"I've thought of something that might," said he; and I was burning to know what when the door opened, and Nell came in without her coat and hat.

She eyed Mr. Starr reproachfully. "Oh, you promised to ask Robert to go back with you to the pier," she said. "Has he gone by himself?"

"I don't —" Mr. Starr had begun guiltily, still sitting beside me on the sofa, when her cousin appeared on the threshold. He was very pale, and looked so grave that I thought some bad news must have come. Nell thought so, too, for she took a step toward him as he paused in the open doorway ——

"You've — heard nothing?" she stammered.

"Poor Rudolph," he began; but at the sound of such a beginning she put out her hands as if to ward off a ghost, and her face was so death-like I was frightened lest she was going to faint. Then, suddenly, it changed, and lit up. I never saw her so beautiful as she was at that moment. She gave a cry of joy, and the next instant our handsome brown skipper had pushed pass Mr. van Buren at the door, and had both her hands in his.

He was dripping with water. Even his hair was so wet that I saw for the first time it was curly.

"Oh, I'm so glad, so glad!" faltered Nell. "Robert said 'poor Rudolph!' and I thought ——"

"I was only going to say poor Rudolph had had a bad

night of it," broke in Mr. van Buren; but I don't think either of them heard.

"Were you anxious about me? Did you care?" asked Jonkheer Brederode.

That seemed to call Nell back to herself. "I was anxious about 'Lorelei,'" she said. "You've brought her back all right?"

"Yes, and 'Waterspin,'" he answered, with the joy gone out of his voice. "We had rough weather to fight against, but we've come to no harm." He turned to me wistfully. "Had you a thought to spare for the skipper once or twice to-day, Miss Rivers?"

I was so grieved for him that, before I knew what I was saying, I exclaimed ——

"Why, I've thought of nothing else!"

I put out my hand to him, and he shook it as if he never meant to let it go.

"How good you are," he said warmly.

And I didn't dare look at Mr. van Buren, for the idea came to me that maybe he would not now believe what I had told him a little while ago.

This morning I scolded Nell before our chaperon for her coldness to Jonkheer Brederode, when he had done so much for her.

"How could you," I asked, "when the poor fellow seemed so pleased to think you cared? It was cruel."

"I didn't *want* him to think I cared," Nell answered.

"Dear girl, you were quite right," said Lady MacNairne. Then she laughed. "He hoped to make our Phil jealous, I suppose, for his *real* thought seems to have been for *her*, doesn't it?"

Neither of us answered. I quite fancied last night that she had been wrong about those surmises of hers; but now, when she put it in this way, I wasn't so sure, after all.

XXIV

NELL has been very strange for the last few days, but singularly lovable to everybody except Jonkheer Brederode; and to him she has never been the same for ten consecutive minutes. Perhaps it is a mercy if Lady MacNairne is right, and he was never in love with her, though it would be sad if he thought of me in that way. I should be sorry to have any one as unhappy as I now am. It's a good thing for me that we were traveling, for if we were at home I should hardly be able to go through it without letting Nell or others suspect the change. As it is, there is always something new to keep my thoughts away from myself and other people, of whom it may be still more unwise to think.

Nell avoided Jonkheer Brederode as much as she could the morning after the storm. She said that, as he took no interest in her, it could not matter what she did so far as he was concerned. She was quite meek and subdued when she answered any question of his, until they differed about something. It was about Urk, a little island she had discovered on the map, exactly in the middle of the Zuider Zee.

When she heard that "Lorelei-Mascotte's" motor had been injured slightly, and we could not go on, she suggested that while we were waiting we might take steamer to the island, stop all night, and come back to Enkhuisen next day. By that time Hendrik, our chauffeur, would have repaired the damage.

"Urk isn't worth seeing," said our skipper.

Nell asked if he had ever been there.

"No," he replied; but he had heard that it was a dull little hole, and it would be far better to stop at Enkhuisen till next

morning, when we could get away, if the weather changed, to Stavoren.

"There's nothing to do in Enkhuisen," said Nell.

"No," said he; "but there'll be less in Urk. I strongly advise you not to go."

"That decides it," said Mr. van Buren, who was stopping on for a day or two.

At once Nell fired up. "Not at all," said she. "No one who doesn't want to, need go; but those who do, will. All favorably inclined hold up their hands."

Up went Mr. Starr's, and Lady MacNairne slowly followed his example. Whether it is that she wishes to be with her nephew because she's fond of him, or whether she thinks highly of her duties as our chaperon; anyway, she generally comes with us if he does. I hated displeasing Mr. van Buren; but when Nell said, "Phil, you'll stick by me, won't you?" I couldn't desert her, especially as I feel that, for some reason or other, she's as restless and unhappy as I am. It may be the poor dear's conscience that troubles her; but I sympathize with her just the same, for *mine* is far from clear. I have such hard, uncharitable thoughts toward one of my own sex — one perhaps not as much older than I am, as she *looks*.

I think Mr. van Buren was torn between his desire to stand by his friend (who said he must stay to superintend the repairs) and his natural wish to see his cousin through any undertaking, no matter how imprudent. He went on trying to dissuade Nell from going to Urk, but the more he talked the more determined she grew. She was surprised at our indifference to a wonderful pinhead of earth, which had contrived to stick up out of the water and become an island after the great inundation that formed the Zuider Zee. Judging from guidebooks, the population was quite unspoiled, as Urk was too remote to be a show place, although the costumes were said to be beautiful. Such a spot was romance itself, and it would

be almost a crime not to visit it. The steamer would leave Enkhuisen after luncheon, returning next day, so we must stop on the island for about eighteen hours; but as the guides mentioned an inn, it would be as simple as interesting to spend a night at the idyllic little place.

Jonkheer Brederode made no more objections after the first, and finally it was settled that all of us should go, except our skipper and Mr. van Buren.

We packed small bags, and took cameras. And we had to scramble through luncheon to catch the steamer, which was rather a horrid one, apparently being intended more for the convenience of enormous bales, sacks, and fruit-baskets than that of its passengers, who were stuffed in anyhow among the cargo. Lady MacNairne was furious, because it was too cold for Tibe on deck, and he wasn't allowed below in the tiny, poky cabin. She argued with the captain, or somebody in authority and velvet slippers; but he being particularly Dutch, and very old, even her fascination had no power. (It is strange, but when Lady MacNairne gets excited she talks more like an American than a Scotswoman; however, I believe she has been to the States.) At last we all three formed a kind of hollow square round Tibe with our skirts over his back, and when he wasn't asleep he amused himself by pretending that our shoes were bones.

Even Mr. Starr could not keep us gay and laughing for the whole two hours of the trip, for we were squeezed in between bags of potatoes (he sat on one), and our feet kept going to sleep. But Nell said, think of Urk, and how seeing Urk would make up for everything.

Eventually we did see it, and it really did look pretty from a distance, with its little close-clustered red roofs like a button-hole bouquet floating on the sea. As the steamer brought us nearer the island something of the glamor faded; but there were about a dozen girls assembled to watch the arrival of the

boat, wearing rather nice, winged white caps and low-necked black dresses.

Quickly we made our cameras ready, expecting them to smile shyly and seem pleased, as at Volendam; but with one accord they sneered and turned their backs, as if on a word of command. We "snapped" nothing but a row of sunburnt necks under the caps. The girls laughed scornfully, and when we landed they repaid our first interest in them by staring at us with impudent contempt. There was no one to carry our bags, so we had to do it ourselves, Mr. Starr taking all he could manage; and as we trailed off to find the hotel, about forty or fifty ugly and disagreeable-looking people followed after us, jeering and evidently making the most personal remarks.

Nobody could, or would, tell us where to find the inn; but it was close by really, as we presently found out for ourselves, after we had gone the wrong way once or twice. Perhaps it wasn't strange, though, that we missed it, for it was a shabby little house with no resemblance to a hotel; and when we went in, the landlord, who was cleaning lamps and curtain-rods in a scene of great disorder in the principal room, showed signs of bewildered surprise at sight of us. But he was a great deal more surprised when he heard that we wished to stay the night. He had not many rooms, he said, and people seldom asked for them; indeed, no tourist had ever done so before within his experience. Still, he would do his best for us, and — yes, we could see the rooms.

He dropped his cleaning-rags and curtain-rods on the floor, and, opening a door, started to go up a ladder which led to a square hole in the floor above. We followed, all but Lady MacNairne, who would not go because Tibe could not, and at the top of the hole were two little boxes of rooms with beds in the wall — stuffy, unmade beds, which perhaps the landlord and some members of the family had slept in.

"This is going to be an adventure," said Nell; but her voice

did not sound very cheerful, and I felt I could have cried when I heard that she and I would have to bunk together in the wall, in a two-foot wide bed smelling like wet moss.

We were dying for tea, or even coffee, but it seemed useless to ask for it, as apparently there were no servants, and the landlord went back to his cleaning the instant we had scrambled down the ladder.

"Perhaps," said I, "we can find a *café*, if we go out and explore."

So we went, followed by beggars for the first time in Holland, and it was a hideous island, with no sign of a *café* or anything else nice, or even clean. All was as unlike as possible to the ideas we had formed of the dear little Hollow Land. There were dead cats, and bad eggs, and old bones lying about the oozy gutters, and people shouted disagreeable things at us from their doorways.

Mr. Starr tried to be merry, but it was as difficult, even for him, as making jokes in the tumbril on the way to have your head cut off, and Lady MacNairne said at last that she would much rather have hers cut off than stay seventeen more hours in such a ghastly hole.

"I simply can't and won't, and you shan't, either!" she exclaimed. "We've been here an hour, and it seems a month. Somehow we must get away."

Poor Nell was sadly crushed. She admitted that she had made a horrible mistake, which she regretted more for our sakes than her own, though she herself was so bored that she felt a decrepit wreck, a hundred years old.

"But the steamer doesn't come back till eight or nine to-morrow morning. I'm afraid we'll have to grin and bear it till then," said Mr. Starr.

"I can't grin, and I won't bear it," replied Lady MacNairne. "Dearest Ronny, you are a man, and we look to you to get us away from here."

Poor Mr. Starr stared wildly out to sea, as if he would call a bark of some sort from the vasty deep; but there was nothing to be seen except an endless expanse of gray water. Nell had torn her dress on a barbed-wire fence which shut us away from the only spot of green on the hideous island; Tibe had unfortunately eaten part of what Mr. Starr said was an Early Christian egg; I had wrenched my ankle badly on a bit of banana peel; Lady MacNairne's smart coat was spoilt by some mud which a small Urkian boy had thrown at her, and Mr. Starr must have felt that, if he didn't instantly perform a miracle, he would be blamed by us all for everything.

"We might get a sailing-boat," he said, when he had thought passionately for a few minutes.

We snapped at the idea, and a moment later we were on our way to the harbor to find out.

Now was the time that I became a person of importance. Owing to my studies, in which Mr. van Buren has encouraged me so kindly, I know enough Dutch to ask for most things I want, and to understand whether people mean to let me have them or not, which seems odd, considering that I deliberately made up my mind not to learn a word when Nell almost dragged me to Holland. Under Mr. Starr's guidance, and at his dictation, I interviewed every sailor we met lounging about the harbor.

It was very discouraging at first. The men were all sure that no sailing-boat could get to Enkhuisen, as the wind was exactly in the wrong quarter; but just as our hearts were on their way down to the boots Tibe had gnawed so much, a brown young man, with crisp black curls and ear-rings, said we could go to Kampen if we liked. It would take four or five hours, and we should have to sleep there, taking the steamer when it started back in the morning. Kampen was beautiful, he told us, with old buildings and water-gates; but even if it hadn't been, we were convinced that it must be better than

Urk; so we joyously engaged a large fishing-boat owned by the brown man and his still browner father.

We made poor Mr. Starr go back alone to the inn and break it to the landlord that we were not going to stay, after all; but he paid for the rooms, so the old man was delighted that he could go on with his cleaning in peace.

Now we began to be quite happy and excited. Mr. Starr brought us bread and cheese from the inn to eat on board, and presently we were all packed away in the fishing-boat, which smelt interestingly of ropes and tar.

Nell and I sat on the floor, where we could feel as well as hear the knocking of the little waves against the planks which alone separated us from the water.

There was not much breeze to begin with, for the winds seemed to be resting after their orgy of yesterday, and just as the old bronze statue and the young bronze statue were ready to start, the little there was died as if of exhaustion.

There we sat and waited, our muscles involuntarily straining, as if to help the boat along; but the sail flapped idly: we might as well have tried to sail on the waxed floor of a ballroom with the windows shut.

"Can't they do *something?*" asked Lady MacNairne, in growing despair.

I passed the question on; but the men shook their heads. Without some faint breeze to help them along they could not move.

When half an hour had dragged itself away, and still the air was dead, or fast asleep (Mr. Starr said that Urk had stifled it), we began to realize the fate to which we were doomed. We would either have to spend the night curled up among coils of rope, with no shelter except a windowless, furnitureless cupboard of four feet by three, which maybe called itself a cabin, or we would have to crawl humbly back to the inn and sue for a night's lodging.

We were hungry and cross, a little tired, and very, very hot. It would have been a great relief to burst into tears, or be disagreeable to some one. I don't know why, but I had the most homesick longing to see Mr. van Buren. It seemed as if, had he come with us, everything would have been right, or at least bearable.

Suddenly, as we were dismally trying to make up our minds what to do, and Mr. Starr had proposed to toss a coin, Lady MacNairne pointed wildly out to sea, crying ——

"Look there — look there!"

A dot of a thing was tearing over the water — a dot of a thing, like our own darling, blessed motor-boat, and the nearer it came the more like it was. At last there was no room for doubt. "Lorelei-Mascotte" was speeding to our rescue, across the Zuider Zee, all alone, without fat, waddling "Waterspin."

I don't believe, if I'd heard that some one had made me a present of the Tower of London, with everything in it, I should have been as distracted with joy as I was now, for the Tower couldn't have got us away from Urk, and "Lorelei-Mascotte" could. Besides, Mr. van Buren would probably not have been in the Tower, whereas intuition told me that he was coming to me — that is to us — as fast as "Mascotte's" motor could bring him.

We stood up, and waved, and shouted. I hardly know what other absurd things we may not have done, in our delirium of joy. As I said to Mr. van Buren a few minutes later, it was exactly like being rescued from a desert island when your food had just given out, and you thought savages were going to kill you in the night.

Jonkheer Brederode was almost superhumanly nice, considering what he had endured at Nell's hands, and that it was really through her obstinacy that we'd suffered so much, and made ourselves and everybody else concerned so much trouble. Mr. van Buren said, for his part, he would have tried to

persuade his friend to punish Nell by leaving her to her fate, if he hadn't been sorry to have it involve me — and, of course, the others.

When Jonkheer Brederode found that by ferociously hard work on his part and Hendrik's, the damage could be repaired sooner than he had expected, he at once proposed following us to Urk. He knew what it was like, and how, within a few minutes after landing, we would hate it. He was certain that we would be in despair at being tied to the wretched island for the night, and he had proposed to go teuf-teufing to our succor. The lack of wind which had meant ruin to our hopes, was a boon to the motor-boat, which had flown along the smooth water at her best speed. And when "Mascotte" was received by us with acclamations, our noble skipper did not even smile a superior smile.

He only said that, when he found he could, he thought he might as well follow, and spin us back, if we liked to go, and he hoped Miss Van Buren would pardon the liberty he had taken with her boat.

If she had been horrid to him then, I do believe I should have slapped her; but she had the grace to laugh and say that "Mascotte" really was a mascot. There is something, I suppose, in having a sense of humor, in which I'm alleged to be deficient.

XXV

THAT was the way it happened that we had two nights at Enkhuisen; but the second we spent on "Lorelei-Mascotte" and "Waterspin," sleeping on the boats for the first time, and it was great fun. The next morning early, we had a picnic breakfast on board, making coffee with the grand apparatus in Mr. Starr's wonderful tea-basket, which he had bought at the most expensive shop in London, like the extravagant young man he is. We didn't wait to finish before we were off; and then came the trip to Stavoren, which Jonkheer Brederode would not have let us make on the boat, if the weather had not been calm, for once more we had to steer straight across the Zuider Zee for several hours.

When we had arrived it was hard to realize that Stavoren had once been a place of vast importance, and that a powerful king had lived there in old, old days, for the bastion seemed the only thing of importance in the poor little town now. But no doubt the great sand-bank, with its famous legend of the Proud Lady, is enough to account for the decline.

Nell smiled in a naughty, mischievous way, when her cousin remarked that his mother's family came originally from Friesland, I suppose because Jonkheer Brederode had just told us that the Frisian people are the most obstinate and persistent in the Netherlands: that all the obstinacy in any other whole province would not be as much as is contained in one Frisian man — or woman. But I think they have reason to be proud of themselves, especially as their obstinacy has kept their ancient customs and language almost intact, and the

Spaniards never could make the least impression upon them by the most original and terrific kinds of tortures, invented especially to subdue Frisians. If they were buried alive, they just went on smiling, and saying, "I will," or "I won't," until their mouths were covered up.

I almost wished that Jonkheer Brederode hadn't said, before Mr. van Buren, that a "Frisian head" is an expression used by the Dutch when they mean incredible hardness or obstinacy; but he didn't mind at all, and immediately told us a thing that happened to his mother and some Frisian cousins of hers when they were girls. A musical genius, a young man, was visiting at their house, and when he had played a great deal for them at their request, he made a bet that they would tire of hearing his music before he tired of making it. They took the bet, and he began to play again; but he was not Frisian, and had never been in Friesland before, therefore he was not prepared for what would happen. Still, he was Dutch, so he did not like giving up, and he went on playing for twenty-four hours, without stopping for more than five minutes at a time. The ladies always exclaimed: "Please go on if you can; we're not tired at all," though they looked very pale and ill; so he didn't stop until he tumbled off his music-stool, and had to be carried away to bed, where he lay for two days. But the Frisian girls suffered no bad consequences, and said, if he had not given up, they would have sat listening for at least a week.

Once Jonkheer Brederode had a big yacht which he lent to the Belgian king for a trip, and there was a Frisian skipper. Every morning the decks were washed at five o'clock, and the king sent word that he would be glad to have it done later in the day, as it waked him up, and he could not go to sleep again. Then the Frisian answered, "Very sorry, King, but we always do wash the decks at five, and it must be done"; which amused his majesty so much that he made no more objections.

If the people of Friesland have great individuality, so have their meers. There was a canal through which we had to pass after Stavoren, like a long, green-walled corridor leading into a huge room. The green wall was made of tall reeds, and we had glimpses of level golden spaces, and sails which seemed to be skimming through meadows. There was a crying of gulls, a smell of salt and of peat, which once formed the great forests swallowed up by the meer. Then, through a kind of water-gateway, we slipped into our first Frisian meer, where the water was like glass, the black sails of yellow sail-boats were purple in the sunlight, and the windmills on the distant shore looked like restless, gesticulating ghosts.

Our wash raised a golden, pearl-fringed wave, but the water was so clear that now and then we fancied we could faintly see the old road under the meer, which they say Frisian farmers use to this day, knowing just where and how to guide their horses along it, through the water.

Because of this road, and others like it, Jonkheer Brederode had taken on a pilot at Stavoren, a man able to keep us off all hidden perils. He seemed to know every person on every heavily-laden peat-boat, or brightly painted eel-boat, and Nell insisted that even the families of wild ducks we met nodded to him as we went by.

We passed from the meer called Morra into the biggest in all Friesland, Fluessen Meer; and it was all rather like the Norfolk Broads, where my father once took me when I was a child. Always going from one meer into another, there were charming canals, decorated with pretty little houses in gardens of roses and hollyhocks, and emphasized, somehow, by strange windmills exactly like large, wise gray owls, or, in the distance, resembling monks bearing aloft tall crosses.

It was exquisite to glide on and on between two worlds; the world of realities, the world of reflections. Villages were far separated one from another, on canal and meer, though

there were many farmhouses, walled round by great trees to keep cool the store-lofts in their steeply-sloping roofs. Gulls sat about like domestic fowls, and perched on the backs of cows, that grazed in meadows fringed with pink and purple flowers.

Men and girls rowed home from milking, and hung their green and scarlet milk-pails in rows on the outer walls of their farmhouse homes. Fishing-nets were looped from pole to pole by the water-side, in such curious fashion as to look like vineyards of trailing brown vines; and as we drew near to Sneek, where we planned to stay the night, we began to meet quaint lighters, with much picturesque family life going on, on board; children playing with queer, homemade toys; ancient, white-capped dames knitting; girls flirting with young men on passing peat-boats — men in scarlet jerseys which, repeated in the smooth water, looked like running fire under glass.

The old seventeenth-century water-gate at Sneek was so beautiful, that we expected to like the place with the ugly name; but after all we hated it, and decided to spend another night in our own floating houses.

All sorts of funny, water-noises waked me early; but then, I hadn't slept very soundly, because I couldn't help thinking a good deal about Mr. van Buren, who found a telegram waiting for him at Sneek, and went away from us by the first train he could catch. I don't know what was in the telegram, but he looked rather miserable as he read it, and I wondered a good deal in the night if his mother had called him back because Freule Menela van der Windt was not pleased at having him stay so long with us.

Nell thought our next day's run, going through the River Boorn to the Sneeker Meer, past Grouw and on to Leeuwarden, even more delightful than the day before; but it didn't seem as interesting to me, somehow. Perhaps it was having a person who was partly Frisian standing by me all the time, and

telling me things, which made the difference; anyway, I had a homesick feeling, as if something were lacking. Mr. Starr said it would be nice to spend a honeymoon on board one of the nice little wherries we saw in the big meer; but I thought of Mr. van Buren and Freule Menela having theirs on one, and it gave me quite a sinking of the heart. I tried not to show that I was sad, but I'm afraid Mr. Starr guessed, for in the afternoon he gave me a water-color sketch he had made in the morning, on deck. He called it a "rough, impressionist thing," but it is really exquisite; the water pale lilac, with silver frills of foam, just as it looked in the light when he sat painting; fields of cloth-of-gold, starred with wild flowers in the foreground; far-off trees in soft gray and violet, with a gleam of rose here and there, which means a house-roof half hidden, in the middle distance. Lady MacNairne admired the sketch particularly; and I got the idea — I hardly know why — that she was not quite pleased to have it given to me instead of to her.

XXVI

IT was late afternoon when we came to Leeuwarden, and the first thing we found out was, that it was not at all a place where we should enjoy stopping on the boats, because of a very "ancient" and very, very "fish-like smell" which pervaded the canal, and made us wear extraordinary expressions on our faces as it found its way to our nostrils. But nobody else seemed even to notice it; nobody else wore agonized expressions; indeed, the girls we met as we drove to the hotel had dove-like, smiling faces. They were tall and radiantly fair, with peace in their eyes; and those who still kept to the fashion of wearing gold and silver helmet-head-dresses were like noble young Minervas. I could have scolded the ones who were silly enough to wear modern hats; but all the old ladies were most satisfactory. We didn't meet one who had not been loyal to the helmet of her youth; and they were such beautiful old creatures that I could well believe the legend Jonkheer Brederode told us: how the sirens of the North Sea had wedded Frisian men, and all the girl-children had been as magically lovely as their mothers.

The old-fashioned, rather dull streets were crowded with people, who seemed in more of a hurry to get somewhere than they need have been, in such a sleepy town; and when we arrived at the hotel all was excitement and bustle. It happened that we had come in the midst of Kermess week, the greatest event of the year at Leeuwarden; and if a party of Americans had not gone away unexpectedly that morning they could not have given us rooms, though Jonkheer Brederode had telegraphed from Sneek.

As soon as we were settled, though it was nearly dinner-time, he proposed that we should dart out and have a look round the fair, because, he said, ladies must not go at night.

"Why not?" asked Nell, quick, as usual, to take him up if he seems inclined to be masterful. "I should think it would be more amusing at night."

"So it is," he admitted calmly.

"Then why aren't we to see it?"

"Because the play is too rough. Tom, Dick, and Harry, as you say in England, come out after dark, when the fair's lighted up and at its gayest, and it is no place for ladies to be hustled about in."

"I've always found 'Tom, Dick, and Harry,' very inoffensive fellows," Nell persisted.

"You've never been to a Dutch Kermess."

"That's why I want to go."

"So you shall, before dark."

"And after dark, too," she added, as obstinately as if she had been a Frisian.

"That is impossible," said Jonkheer Brederode, his mouth and chin looking hard and firm.

Nell didn't say any more, though she shrugged her shoulders; but the expression of her eyes was ominous, and I felt that she was planning mischief.

We walked out to the Kermess, which Lady MacNairne and Mr. Starr pronounced very like a French country fair; but it seemed wonderful to me. There were streets and streets of booths, little and big, gorgeously decorated, where people in the costumes of their provinces sold every imaginable kind of thing. Nell was so well-behaved that she evidently disarmed Jonkheer Brederode's suspicions, if he had shared mine; and when she proposed buying a quantity of sweets and cheap toys for us to give away to families of children upon the lighters we passed on canals, he was ready to humor her. We

chose all sorts of toys and sweets — enough to last us for days of playing Santa Claus — and bargained in Dutch with the people who sold, making them laugh sometimes. Then, Jonkheer Brederode took us to all the best side-shows: the giant steer, as big as sixteen every-day oxen; the smallest horse in the world, a fairy beast, thoughtfully doing sums in the sand with his miniature forepaw; the fat lady, very bored and warm; the fair Circassian, who lured audiences into a hot theater with tinsel decorations like a Christmas-tree and hundreds of colored lights. There were other sights; but Jonkheer Brederode said these were the only ones for ladies, and hurried us by some of the booths with painted pictures of three-headed people or girls cut off at the waist, which Nell wished particularly to see. He wouldn't let us go into the merry-go-rounds either, and by the time we got back to the hotel — our hands full of dolls, tops, spotted wooden horses, boxes of blocks, and packets of nougat surmounted with chenille monkeys — she was boiling with pent-up resentment.

Already we were late for dinner, and we still had to dress; but Nell — who shared a room with me, as the hotel was crowded — said that she must slip out again, to buy something which she wished to select when alone; she would not be gone many minutes.

I was all ready when she ran in again with two large bundles in her hands. She would not tell me what they were, as she was in a hurry to change (at least, that was her excuse), but promised that I should see something interesting if I would come up to the room with her after dining; and I was not to tell any one that she had been out for the second time.

We were long over our dinner, as there was such a crowd that the waiters grew quite confused; and, at the end, we three women sat with Jonkheer Brederode and Mr. Starr in the garden behind the hotel, while the men smoked. Nell was so patient that I almost thought she had forgotten the bundles

up-stairs. But at last Lady MacNairne, hearing a clock chime ten, announced that she had some writing to do before going to bed.

"I suppose you will have a look at the Kermess again?" she said to our two knights.

"I've seen dozens of such fairs; and when you've seen one, you've seen pretty well all, nowadays. But if the Mariner would like to go, I shall be glad to go with him," Jonkheer Brederode answered.

"I'm not sure I didn't see enough this afternoon," said Mr. Starr. "Anyhow, I mean to have another cigarette or two here; and I do think the ladies might stop with me, for I have a hundred things to say."

Lady MacNairne and Nell were on their feet, however, and would not be persuaded; so we bade each other good-night, and three minutes later Nell was opening her parcels in our room.

"Among the last letters that were forwarded from London, was a larger check than I expected from the *Fireside Friend*," said she; "so I've bought a present for you, and for me, from my affectionate self."

With that, she had the paper wrappings off two glittering Frisian head-dresses, like beautiful gold skull-caps. And in the other bundle were two black shawls, like those I had seen several girls of Leeuwarden wearing.

"Oh, how sweet!" I exclaimed. "Thank you so much. I've been wanting some kind of costume ever since Amsterdam, where they were so expensive. These are to take home and keep as souvenirs, when we are at work in our poor little flat, just as if nothing had ever happened to us."

Nell gave a shudder, but she didn't say that we never would go home and to work again, as she used to say if I spoke of it when we were beginning our trip. Instead she said ——

"I don't know about the future; but I'm going to wear mine to-night."

"What, sleep in that helmet?" I asked.

She laughed. "I'm not thinking about sleep yet. It's just the edge of the evening — in Kermess week. Watch me."

She undid her hair, which is very long and thick, and seems even thicker than it is, if possible, because it is so wavy. Then she plaited it tightly into two braids, and straining, and pulling, and pushing the little ripples and rings back from her face, as well as she could, she managed to put on the helmet. Then she tied the shawl over her shoulders; and as she had on a short dark skirt which was unnoticeable, she looked, for all the world, like a beautiful Frisian girl.

I told her this, and she said, "Will you be a Frisian girl too, and come out with me to see the Kermess at the time when it's worth seeing?"

I was dreadfully startled, and of course said "No." I had never done anything in disguise, and I never would.

"Very well, then," said Nell, "I'll go alone."

I tried to dissuade her; but she did not object to shocking Jonkheer Brederode.

"It would do him good," she said. "Only he won't have the chance this time, because no one would ever recognize me, would they?"

I looked hard at her, and was not quite sure, though the pushing back of the hair and the wearing of the helmet did change her wonderfully, to say nothing of the shawl. But she looked far too beautiful to go out alone in the night. The golden head-dress gave her hair the color of copper beech leaves, and the gleam of the metal so close to the face made her complexion transparent, as if a light were shining through a thin sheet of mother-o'-pearl.

When I found that she was determined, I told her that I would go, rather than she should run the risk alone; but she

She looked, for all the world, like a beautiful Frisian girl

only laughed, and said there was no risk. Even if our skipper were right about foreigners, surely two Frisian girls of the lower classes might walk about at the fair, when the best fun was going on; we should find plenty of others exactly like ourselves. And when I'd tried the helmet on before the mirror, I could not resist wishing that Mr. van Buren might have seen it — simply to amuse him, of course.

The next thing was to steal down-stairs without being seen. We wrapped our shawls over our heads, helmets and all; but we need not have feared, every one was away at some entertainment or other, and we did not meet a soul. Once outside the hotel, we rearranged the shawls, crossing the ends behind our waists, and Nell said that it did not matter if we met the whole world now. As we should not have to open our mouths to any one, and betray our ignorance of Dutch, there would be nothing to show that we were not Frisian girls.

The full moon was just coming up as we left the hotel, but when we had turned two or three corners, and reached the streets where the Kermess was going on, there was such a white blaze of electricity that the moon and her pale light were swallowed up. In the dazzling illumination, the booths and merry-go-rounds, and carousels, with their sparkling decorations of tinsel, seemed to drip gold and silver; and the garlands and trees and fountains of electric light scintillated like myriads of diamonds.

There had been crowds in the afternoon, but now they were five times as dense. The brilliant, open-air *cafés* were crammed, and the band in each one was playing a different air. Everybody was laughing, and shouting and singing; the people had thrown away their Dutch reserve, and even middle-aged men and women were enjoying themselves like children.

I felt self-conscious and guilty at first, but it was such a gay scene that nobody could help getting into the spirit of it; and

just as Nell had prophesied, there were plenty of Frisian girls about, in gold or silver helmets, like ours, only nobody stared at them particularly, and everybody did stare at us.

I remarked this to Nell, and the fact that no shawls of our sort were being worn; but she laughed and said that if people stared we might as well take it as a compliment; she flattered herself that we happened to be looking our best.

It really was fun. We dared not buy anything on account of our foreign accent; but we wandered from street to street, jostled by the crowd, stopping in front of the gayest booths, and even going into a side-show where a Javanese man was having fits to please the audience. Jonkheer Brederode had refused to take us in the afternoon, when we had shown an interest in the painting which advertised the Javanese creature; but, after all, the fits were more exciting on canvas than they were inside the hot, crowded tent, and some young soldiers stared at us so much that we were glad to get out.

Next door was the most gorgeous *carousel* I ever saw. It was spinning round under a red plush roof, embroidered with gold and sparkling crystals, and festooned with silver chains. To the strains of the Dutch national air, life-sized elephants with gilded castles, huge giraffes, alarming lions, terrific tigers, beautiful swans, and Sedan chairs were whirling madly, with great effect of glitter and gaiety.

"All my life I've wanted to ride in a merry-go-round," said Nell, "and I never have. Now's our one chance. There's a Spanish bull and a Polar bear to let. Come on."

She seized my hand, and before I realized what we were doing, I was sitting on a large bull, wildly clinging to its horns, while Nell, just in front, perched on the back of a sly-looking white bear.

No sooner were we settled than the four young soldiers who had stared in the fit-man's tent, jumped on some other animals in the procession, and as we began to fly round the big

ring, they called out and waved their hands as if they were friends of ours. I was afraid they must have followed us out of the tent, and I could understand enough Dutch to know that they were saying things about our looks. Every one in the crowd laughed and encouraged them, and several people standing by to watch, spoke to Nell and me as we whirled.

It was an awful situation. What with the embarrassment, the shame, the horrid consciousness of being part of the show, and the giddiness that came over me with the motion, it was all I could do to keep from crying. But if I had sobbed while spinning round the ring on the back of a bull, I should have been a more conspicuous figure than ever, so I controlled myself with all my might. Oh, if only I could have got down, to run away and hide! but there we both had to sit till time for the merry-go-round to stop, and I would have given all that's left of the two hundred pounds Captain Noble willed me, to make the horrid machinery break down.

As we sailed round and round my agonized eyes caught the surprised gaze of a man I knew. For an instant I could not remember how, or where, or how much I knew him; but suddenly it all came back. I recognized Sir Alexander MacNairne, whose acquaintance we made in Amsterdam, through Tibe, and the worst thing was that, from the expression of his face, I was almost sure he recognized us both, in spite of our disguise.

By this time, the sitting on the bull, and the continued whirling at the mercy of a thousand eyes, began to seem a torture such as might have been inflicted by the Inquisition if you had argued with them about some little thing. I'm sure, if any one had sprung forward at this moment to tell me that if I would become a Dissenter of any kind, or belong to the Salvation Army, I needn't be a martyr any longer, but should be saved at once, I would have screamed "Yes — yes — *yes!*"

At last the animals did slow down, and Nell and I slid off

our monsters before they had stopped; but instead of improving our situation, we had made it worse.

While we had been sailing round the ring, no one could approach disagreeably near. The minute we tried to mingle with the crowd and disappear in it, however, the impudent young soldiers mingled too, having the evident intention of disappearing with us.

The things that happened next, happened so quickly, one after the other, that they are still confused in my memory. At the time I knew only that the soldiers were following and surrounding Nell and me; that my heart was beating fast, that her cheeks were scarlet and her eyes very large and bright, either with fear or anger, or both; that I felt an arm go round my waist, and a man's rather beery breath close to my ear; that I cried "Oh!" that rude girls were laughing; and then that Nell was boxing a man's ears. I am not even quite sure that everything was in this exact order! but just as I heard that sound of "smack — smack," I saw Sir Alexander MacNairne not far off, and without stopping to remember that we were supposed to be Frisian peasant girls, I called to him. I think I said, "Oh, Sir Alexander MacNairne, come — please come!"

With that, he began to knock people about, and break a path through to get to us; and some of them laughed, and some were angry. Even in those few seconds I could see that he was a hot-tempered man, and that the laughs made him furious. He said things in English, with just the faintest Scotch "burr"; and as there were no Dutchmen of Mr. van Buren's type in the rude crowd, the Scotsman had soon tumbled the men about like ninepins — all except the soldiers — and got close to us.

But the soldiers were not to be thrown off so easily, even by such a big man as Sir Alexander MacNairne, and Nell and I would have been in all the horrors of a fight — a fight on our account, too — if Jonkheer Brederode had not appeared in the

midst, as suddenly and unexpectedly as if he had dropped from the round, full moon.

He must have come from behind me, and my mouth was open to exclaim how thankful I was to see him, when he hastily whispered, just loud enough for Nell and me to hear, "Don't seem to know me." Then he began talking authoritatively in Dutch to the young soldiers, looking so stern and formidable that it was no wonder the fun died out of their faces (they were mere boys, all four), and they shrank away from Nell and me as if we had been hot coals which had burnt them when they touched us.

When Jonkheer Brederode first dashed to our rescue, Sir Alexander MacNairne had been extremely busy with two of the little soldiers, but overawed by their countryman's distinguished manner and severe words, they lost their desire to fight and sheepishly joined their companions. This gave Sir Alexander a chance to see to whom he owed the diversion, and to my surprise he exclaimed, "Rudolph Brederode!"

He did not speak the name as if he were pleased, but uttered it quite fiercely. His good-looking face grew red, and his blue eyes sparkled with anger. I *was* astonished, for neither Nell nor I had any idea that they knew each other; and I was still more startled, and horrified as well, to see Sir Alexander make a spring toward Jonkheer Brederode, as if he meant to strike him.

Our skipper stood perfectly still, looking at him, though Sir Alexander's arm was raised as if in menace; but at that instant the lifted hand was seized, and the arm was moved up and down rapidly, as if it were a stiff pump-handle that needed oiling.

It was Mr. Starr who had seized it, and began to shake it so furiously. Before the tall Scotsman had time to understand what was happening, Mr. Starr had wheeled him round so that his back was turned toward us, and I heard the nice

American voice exclaiming, "How *do* you do? Never had such a surprise. Where's your wife?"

"Where's my wife? That's what I mean to ask Brede — " Sir Alexander had begun, struggling to get his hand out of Mr. Starr's cordial clasp. But before I could hear the end of the word, much less the first syllable of another, Jonkheer Brederode was hustling Nell and me, out of sight of the others, round the carousel.

"Come with me, and get out of this, quickly," he said, but not in a scolding tone, such as I had dreaded when he discovered us in such a shocking situation brought on by our own folly.

I was dying to ask questions, but of course I did not dare; and though I was afraid at first that Nell would resist, she was as meek as a sugar lamb.

The motive seemed very mysterious, but I couldn't help fancying it was on Sir Alexander MacNairne's account that Jonkheer Brederode had wished us not to recognize him; still I could not think why. When we had talked about Sir Alexander MacNairne the other day at Amsterdam, the Jonkheer said nothing about their acquaintance. I wondered if there had been a quarrel, and if so, what it could have been about, though it was certainly no affair of mine. Still, it is hard to control one's thoughts; and I wondered more and more as Jonkheer Brederode hurried Nell and me back to the hotel, not by the short way we had taken before, but dodging about through a dozen intricate streets as if he were anxious to give trouble to any one who might be following. Our skipper seemed preoccupied, too, which was a good thing for us, as it took his mind off our crimes. As it was, he actually made no allusion to our strange costume, our escapade, or even the hateful adventure from which he had rescued us — for that he *had* rescued us there was no question. Sir Alexander MacNairne, with his quick temper, and his ignorance of the

Dutch character as well as the Dutch language, and the privileges of Kermess week, was making matters worse for us, instead of better, when Jonkheer Brederode dashed in and saved the situation. What would have happened if he hadn't come, I dared not think, for there would certainly have been a fight, and Nell and I might presently have found ourselves, with Sir Alexander MacNairne, in the hands of the police.

The skipper might easily have enlarged on this, and pointed a moral lesson, but not a word did he say about anything that had happened. Maybe, this humiliated us even more than if he had scolded, for his silence was very marked, and he appeared to take not the slightest interest in either of us, except to get us indoors, where we could do no further mischief. His manner was cold; and whether this arose from his strange preoccupation, or from annoyance with us, I couldn't decide. In either case, I was thankful when we were in our room, and had taken off our shawls and the beautiful helmets which now I detested.

But we had not had time to undress, when there was a knock at the door. Nell opened it, and there stood Lady MacNairne, in a dressing-gown, with a veil wrapped over her head — perhaps to hide curling-pins. I thought that Jonkheer Brederode must have roused her up to report our crimes, and sent her to show us the error of our ways, though to do such a thing was unlike him. But her first words proved that I had misjudged our poor skipper.

"Girls," she said, "could you be ready to leave the hotel and go on board 'Lorelei' — good gracious, I mean 'Mascotte'! — in a quarter of an hour?"

I almost thought she must be talking in her sleep.

"Why, Lady MacNairne!" I exclaimed, "it's half-past eleven."

"I know," said she. "All the more reason for haste. I'm not joking. There's a reason why we ought to be off at once. Of

course, 'Mascotte' is your boat, dear Nell, and it's your trip. But you and Phyllis are so kind to me always, that I'm sure you'll consent without asking for more explanations, won't you, when I say that it's for *my* sake, and to save a lot of bother."

When Lady MacNairne wants anybody to do anything for her, she makes herself perfectly irresistible. I don't know at all how, but I only wish I had the art of doing it. Sometimes she is domineering — if it's a man to be managed — or even cross; sometimes she is soft as a dove; but whichever it is, you feel as if streams of magnetic fluid poured out of the tips of her fingers all over you, and your one anxiety is to do what she wants you to do, as quickly as possible.

It was like that with Nell and me, now. We said, both together, that we wouldn't be ten minutes, and we weren't. But in spite of the wild speed with which we flung together the few things we had unpacked, and in spite of the fact that we were dressed, except for our hats, while Lady MacNairne was in her wrapper, she was ready before us.

We were to meet in her room, and just as we arrived, dressing-bags in hand — for it was not a time of night to ring for porters — Mr. Starr appeared round a turn of the corridor. He didn't see us at first, but began to say something to his aunt about a "narrow shave," when he caught sight of Nell and me inside the open door.

I was on the point of asking him what had become of Sir Alexander MacNairne, with whom we had left him violently shaking hands, when I remembered that Lady MacNairne had said he was a "relation of hers by marriage," so I thought, since there was evidently trouble of some sort between him and Jonkheer Brederode, I had better not bring up the subject in her presence. Whatever might be the mysterious reason which was taking us away like thieves in the night, Mr. Starr had the air of knowing it — as he naturally would, since Lady

MacNairne was his aunt; but no matter which of the other two men was to blame, I was sure *he* was innocent. He was as nice and helpful, too, about carrying down all our things, as if it were his interest instead of the others', to get us out of the hotel and on to the boat, although he is such a lazy, erratic young man, that he must have been quite upset by the surprise and confusion.

Jonkheer Brederode had been down-stairs, paying our bills and settling up with the landlady, who seemed to be the only person not at the Kermess. As we all walked toward him, to show that we were ready to start, I caught a few words which the landlady was saying. I am not yet sure of getting things right in Dutch, but it did sound as if she said in reply to some question or order of his, "Rely on me. No such impertinent demand shall be answered."

A stuffy cab, which might have been fifty years old, had, it seemed, been called by Mr. Starr, who was as sympathetic as usual in the dilemmas of others. We squeezed in, anyhow, except Jonkheer Brederode, who sat on the box to tell the driver how to go, his cap pulled over his eyes, as if it were pouring with rain, instead of being the most brilliant moonlight night; and Tibe sat on all our laps at once.

Hendrik and Toon sleep on "Mascotte" and "Waterspin," and they were on board, true to duty, though if they had been anything but Dutchmen, they would probably have sneaked slyly off to the Kermess. They are not the sort of persons who show surprise at anything (Nell says that if the motor burst under Hendrik's nose, he would simply rub it with a piece of cotton waste — his nose or the motor, it would not much matter which — and go on with what he had been doing before); so no time was lost, and in ten minutes we were off, finding our way by the clear moonlight, as easily as if it had been day.

We had not gone far, when I spied another motor-boat,

larger than ours, but not so smart, in harbor, and I stared with all my eyes, trying to make out her name, for she had not been there when we came in; but "Mascotte" flew by like a bird — much faster than she ever goes by day, in the water-traffic, and I could not see it.

Everything was much too exciting for us to wish to sleep, though had we stopped quietly in the hotel, we should have been in bed before this. Jonkheer Brederode advised us to go below, as the air was chilly on the water, and such a wind had come up that it blew away two cushions from our deck-chairs. But we would not be persuaded.

Out of the narrow canal we slid, into a wide expanse of water, cold as liquid steel under the moon, and tossed into little sharp-edged waves which sent "Mascotte" rolling from side to side, so choppily that I was glad to get into the next canal, even narrower than the first, such a mere slip of water that cows on shore, vague, shadowy, shapes, puffed clouds of clover-sweet breath in our faces as we leaned toward them from the deck.

The windows of little thatched cottages seemed to look straight into our cabin windows, like curiously glinting, wakeful eyes; and Jonkheer Brederode said that, by daylight when the canal was crowded with barges and lighters, it needed almost as much skill and patience to steer through it, as to guide a motor-car through Piccadilly in the height of the season.

It took bribery and corruption, I'm afraid, to get the sluice gates opened for us in the middle of the night; and Jonkheer Brederode had his Club flag flying, in case any one proved obstinate. But no one did, so perhaps — as people are supposed to be quite the opposite of their real selves in disposition, if waked suddenly — Frisians are weak and yielding if roused in the night.

It was wonderful to see the moonlight fading into dawn, over the canal, and the gentle, indistinct landscape, and I

wished that Mr. van Buren could have been with us, as I am sure it was the kind of thing which would have appealed to his heart — especially if Freule Menela were not with him, to hold him down to earth.

Morning was clear in the sky when we came to Groningen, and we were not in the least tired, though we had not even tried to doze. At a nice hotel, called by the odd name of the "Seven Provinces," where Jonkheer Brederode had arranged for us to stop a night if our plans had not been suddenly changed, there was a telegram for Nell. It was from Mr. van Buren, and said, "Can I bring fiancée and sisters to spend a day with you at Utrecht? Answer, Robert van B., Scheveningen."

Of course, one word costs less than two, and is therefore wiser to use in a telegram. Besides, she *is* his fiancée. But it looked so irrevocable, staring up from the paper, that I felt more sorry for him than ever. I was a little excited, too, as Nell was wiring back "Yes, delighted," and adding the date on which we expected to arrive at Utrecht. I am excited still, as I write this; for I have the idea that Freule Menela was angry with Mr. van Buren for spending so much time with us, and that she wants to punish him — or somebody else.

RONALD LESTER STARR'S POINT OF VIEW

XXVII

I SHOULD think few men ever loved more passionately, yet picturesquely, than I loved those two beautiful stepsisters when for their sakes I started out upon a criminal, motor-boating career.

To have their society, to gaze daily upon their lovely faces, to hear their charming voices, and to find out which girl I really loved more than the other, I willingly stole an aunt and then lied about her so often, that eventually I almost began to believe she was my aunt. Perhaps — I said to myself, when any barking dogs escaped from the kennel of my conscience to be soothed — perhaps she had been my aunt in another state of existence. But then, I would have said anything about her, to myself or others, by way of furthering the cause; and the game was well worth the candle — for the first part of the trip.

Alb being frankly and openly a worshiper of the adorable Nell Van Buren, my own countrywoman, I saw that, out of all the girls I ever loved, including her stepsister, she was the only one it would be impossible for me to live without.

That state of mind lasted up to the night when we arrived at the deadest of all Dead Cities of the Zuider Zee, Enkhuisen. There it broke upon me out of a clear sky that my Burne-Jones angel, Phyllis Rivers, loved and was loved by, another; that other, a graven image of a Viking, who could never appreciate her as she deserved.

Until the blow fell, I had always, half unconsciously, felt that she was there; that if I lost the incomparable Nell, the

exquisite Phyllis was on the spot to console me; and she is at her best as a consoler. But suddenly, at a moment when I was soaked with rain, snubbed by Nell, as well as foolishly concerned about the fate of that white man's burden, my Albatross, and altogether ill-fitted to bear further misfortunes, I learnt that Phyllis regarded me as a brother.

I hid my chagrin in sympathy for hers, but Phyllis in tears proved distracting. She is the one girl I have ever seen who can cry without a deplorable redness of the nose. Tears rolled like pearls over her lower lashes, which are almost as long as the fringe of the upper lids, and I wondered how I could ever have thought another girl more desirable. Too late for my comfort did she assure me that, in her opinion, my case was not hopeless with her stepsister. It was Phyllis, not Nell, whom I now wished to snatch from the arms of a hated rival (not that she was in them yet, but she might be at any minute unless I secured her) and it was painful that at such a crisis she should throw her once unattainable stepsister at my head.

Next day, to be sure, when Alb brought the motor-boat to our rescue at Urk, the way Nell's big hazel eyes lit up at sight of him, set my heart vibrating again like a pendulum, and I found myself much in the same condition I had been in at first; unable to decide which, after all, was the more indispensable of the two girls. But this return to chaos did not make for peace of mind, because, though I could not bear to lose either, I should be lucky if I contrived to keep one. Besides, there was the worry about Sir Alec MacNairne, and the danger that he might pounce down upon us to destroy the fabric I had so carefully woven.

Altogether, the features of Friesland were not cut with the same cameo-clearness upon my perception that other parts of Holland had taken a few weeks or even days ago, when I was young and happy.

As I remarked early in our black partnership, even an

Albatross can have its uses. Perhaps, if the truth were known, the Ancient Mariner occasionally fell down and would have broken a bone if the Albatross, tied round his neck, had not acted as a kind of cushion for his protection. At Amsterdam, in a moment of peril for our plot, Alb acted somewhat in this capacity for me, showing himself to be possessed of all that shrewd adroitness which should furnish the equipment of every well-regulated villain. At Leeuwarden, therefore, it was for me to do something desperate when desperate need arose.

I shall never cease to applaud my own presence of mind in the matter of turning the enemy's flank. My wrists were lame for days after that famous handshake with Aunt Fay's husband which, in his surprise, spun the big fellow round like a teetotum, and gave Alb a chance to vanish with the girls.

If Aunt Fay had indeed been on board "Lorelei," re-named "Mascotte"; if the "M.," late "L.," had been Brederode's boat, and he had really been flirting with my aunt through the waterways of Holland, according to Sir Alec's wild impression, I couldn't have been more anxious to save her from his jealous wrath by giving him the slip.

Alb had never spoken of a flirtation, and though, at the time it was first sprung upon me by Sir Alec, I was angry with the Albatross for his close-mouthedness, my inconvenient sense of justice forced me to admit afterwards that it wasn't exactly the kind of thing he could have confided to me of all others.

When that peppery Scotsman opened his heart, and poured forth the true story of Aunt Fay's mysterious disappearance from the scene, for a minute or two any feather floating in my direction could have knocked me down; but I hung on to my captive uncle all the same, while I rearranged my ideas of the universe at large, and my corner of it in particular.

I told him it was nonsense to be jealous of Aunt Fay. Of course such a pretty, jolly woman as she, full of life and fun as

a girl, was bound to be popular with men, and to flirt with them a little. There was nothing in that to make a fuss about, said I. As for Brederode (whom I had to admit knowing, since we must have been seen together) I assured Sir Alec that, if he could hear Rudolph talk in a friendly way about my aunt, he wouldn't have the slightest uneasiness. Finally I made the fiery fellow confess that Aunt Fay's last little flirtation — the most innocent in the world, like all her "affairs" — was not with Brederode but with an Englishman, an officer in some crack regiment. Sir Alec did not deny that he had scolded his wife. He said that she had "answered him back," that there had been "words" on both sides, that she had stamped her foot and thrown a bunch of roses at him — middle-aged, wet-footed roses snatched from a vase which happened to be handy. That he had called her a minx; that she had retorted with "beast"; that he had stalked out of the room and then out of the house, slamming doors as hard as he could; that when he returned, not exactly to apologize, but to make up at any price, it was to find her gone, with her maid and several boxes, leaving no address; that he had tracked her to London, and eventually — as he believed — to Paris; that while there he had seen a newspaper paragraph announcing that Lady MacNairne was traveling through Dutch waterways on a motor-boat belonging to Jonkheer Brederode; that he had taken train for Amsterdam, where he had presently discovered that "Lorelei" had been; that he had visited all hotels, hoping to find the names of the party in the visitors' book, but had not been able to discover them (luckily we hadn't put our names down, and on leaving Alb had tactfully hinted to the manager that no inquiries concerning us were to be answered); that since then all trace of "Lorelei" had been lost.

I replied that it was probably a mistake made by some journalist, and that Lady MacNairne had never been on board Brederode's boat. I was going on to say more things,

when Sir Alec exclaimed, "Why, *you* ought to know where the boat is, and who's on board her. You and Brederode were together to-night, and —— "

"We hadn't been together for ten minutes," I vowed; and kept to the strict letter of the truth, for I had been smoking alone in the garden when Brederode came back and proposed that after all we should have a stroll round the fair. It hadn't taken us ten minutes to get there from the hotel.

"I didn't ask Brederode any questions about himself after meeting him," I went on; and that also was strictly true. "But," I hurriedly added, seeing a loophole of escape, "I can look him up, if you like, and, without mentioning your name, find out whether Aunt Fay is, or ever has been, with his party, which I doubt. Don't you think, for the sake of her name and yours, that would be better than for you to seek him out and make a row, before you're sure whether there's anything to row about?"

Sir Alec reflected for a minute, which was evidently an effort, then answered that perhaps I was right. But supposing I missed Brederode, whose haste to slip away went far to prove his guilt?

I would not miss him, said I. And his disappearance proved nothing. There were those pretty Frisian girls that he — Sir Alec — had been protecting when Rudolph and I came along. Brederode had probably escorted them home, not seeing any reason why he should interrupt our conversation.

My innocent surprise on hearing that, despite their costumes, the girls were not Frisian girls, but English or American ladies he had met in Amsterdam, convinced Sir Alec that they were strangers to me. And finally the scene ended by my promising to find Brederode, who was certainly — I said — stopping in the town, whether or no he had brought a motor-boat to Leeuwarden. I was to question Brederode in a diplomatic manner, and then to report to Sir Alec, on a

motor-launch he had hired in Amsterdam, as the best means of tracking down the craft for which he sought. This boat, "Wilhelmina," was now in the canal at Leeuwarden, but, for reasons intimately concerning that canal, he had taken a room for the night at a hotel recommended by his chauffeur.

Fortunate it was for us that the chauffeur did not happen to prefer our hotel; and almost equally fortunate that Sir Alec was not spending much time on board his hired vessel, for, were he lurking there, it would be difficult to slip past without being followed. He had perhaps seen "Mascotte" on entering the canal (as it appeared that he had come in only toward evening), but he had not suspected the innocent-looking little creature, with her fat chaperon, "Waterspin," of having an alias. If, however, a motor-boat attempted to glide past his in the night, he would give chase, and see us on board "Mascotte." For this reason I was delighted to hear that he was at a hotel for the night, and I advised him to go there at once, to await my coming.

"How long shall you be?" he asked impatiently.

I assured him that all I had to do might keep me an hour; but I saved a few tattered rags of conscience by evading a verbal promise to call on him at the end of that hour. So much he took for granted; and, as the things I *really* had to do were to get the whole party on to "Mascotte" and out of the capital of Friesland, I left my uncle-in-law without much ceremony.

Nothing could have been neater than the way we gave him the slip, flying by his deserted motor-boat without a qualm, and, I hoped, beyond his reach at the same time.

Never, during the whole course of the trip, had I been as glad to arrive at a place as I was to arrive at Groningen.

We ought, according to the program of our itinerary mapped out by Alb, to have reached the big town in the afternoon instead of morning, and to have spent the time till evening in seeing sights. But all was changed now. Luckily Alb (who is

an uncomfortable stickler for truth at all costs) could conscientiously inform the girls that Groningen's principal attractions might be seen in a couple of hours.

We tore round the place in the fastest cab to be got, I having bribed the driver not to spare his horse; yet it was at Alb the girls looked reproachfully, when they were allowed but three minutes in the largest market-place of Holland, five for St. Martin's Church and the organ praised by diplomatic Erasmus, two to search vainly for diamond-gleaming glass tiles on houses which Amici admired forty years ago; and another grudging two for a gallop through the Noorden Plantation, of which the rich town is proud. There must be something about my appearance which convinces people that, whatever evil is afoot, I, at least, am innocent. I have noticed this since boyhood, the phenomenon being most conspicuous when I was least deserving; whereas, with Alb, it is the other way round. His darkly handsome face, with its severely clear-cut features, his black hair and brows, his somber eyes, are the legitimate qualifications of the stage villain. Even the well-known cigarette is seldom lacking; therefore, if I wished for revenge, I have often had it. When I am to blame for anything, Alb is sure to be suspected.

Indeed, any one might have thought, from the impatient fire in his eyes, as he steered "Lorelei" (alias "Mascotte") through the canal after leaving Groningen, that his was the secret need for haste, his the guilty desire to escape.

As for me, I hid my rage at the legal mandate which here compelled us to "go no faster than a man can walk." Under an air of blithe *insouciance* I disguised my fears, never starting perceptibly at "any toot" behind us which might mean Sir Alec on our track, and appearing to enjoy with the free spirit of a boy, the one great amusement of the day.

This consisted in surprising and making happy many families of children on board the lighters we passed, by

bestowing upon them toys and strange sugary cakes bought at Leeuwarden Kermess. Not all the lighters had children, but those that had, owned dozens, and all the ugly ones had whooping-cough.

If I had been given my way, only the pretty children and those who did not whoop should have got presents; but the extraordinary lady who plays the part of aunt to me, and chaperon to the Angels, said that the uglier you are, the more gifts you need. Perhaps it is on this principle she has demanded so many from me. But — *is* she ugly? I hardly know. She has one of those strange little faces which do not seem to express the soul behind them — a face whose features I can't see when I shut my eyes. I should like, by the way, to know what hers are like, behind her big blue spectacles; but she says they are not strong, so possibly the blue glass is a merciful dispensation.

Her mildest hints, as well as her commands, are invariably acted upon, and though she seldom insists, she magnetizes. Accordingly, the ugliest children got the best things; but as there were more pretty than ugly ones, the toys lasted all the way along the somewhat monotonous canal to Assen, a little town half lost in its own forests.

It took us till evening to get there, and as we were to sleep on the boats, rather than risk the hotel, I proposed to Alb that we should start again early the next morning, before the ladies waked. "There can't be much to see at Assen," said I, "and if, after he'd been given the slip, my peppery Scotch uncle tumbled to the idea of 'Lorelei' and 'Mascotte' being one —— "

"That would be reason enough for stopping at Assen," said Brederode. "There *are* things to see there, very good and unique things; but ordinary tourists don't often hear about them, and if Sir Alec MacNairne is chasing us, he'll glide by Assen without a thought."

This put a different face on the matter, and I was able to smile calmly when Alb whetted the Angels' appetite by describing the treasures concealed among the groves surrounding Assen. They were not exactly at Assen, it seemed, but Assen was the starting-point, and from there you set forth in carriages to Rolde, for the purpose of gazing upon Hunnebetten.

What these might be, when you found them, I had not an idea, though pride forbade me to inquire of Alb, especially before the girls. But pride never forbids Aunt Fay's little counterfeit presentment (perhaps it will save time if in the future I allude to her as the L.C.P.) to ask any question. She is never satisfied with guide-books, but demands and absorbs information about every place we visit, scribbling down notes in the book she wears on her chatelaine. (There must have been dozens of "refills" fitted in between the silver covers since we started, though what she wants of the stuff she collects, I can't imagine.) She did not hesitate to exclaim, "What on earth are Hunnebetten?" And there was no ignominy in listening, with a bored air of having been born knowing these things, while Alb described the objects as supposed graves of Huns, built of glacier-borne stones.

Next morning we drove out to worship at these ancient shrines, winding along a charming, wooded road, through avenues of young oaks, balsamic pine forests, and acres of purple heather, to say nothing of a certain pink flower which must be heather's Dutch cousin.

Some of the Hunnebetten were hidden in the woods, others rose gloomily out of the sweet simplicity of a hayfield, but each contrived to give the effect of a miniature Stonehenge, and had there been only one monument instead of three, it would have been worth the trouble we took to see it. Besides, our expedition was rewarded in another way. When we returned to the boats after breakfasting at a *café* in the woods,

it was to hear that a motor-launch, patriotically bearing the name of "Wilhelmina," had gone by, faster than the legal limit, as if in haste to reach Meppel. According to Hendrik and Toon, a tall gentleman had sprung up from the deck-chair rushed to the rail, and stared hard at "Mascotte"; but "Wilhelmina" had not slowed down.

On hearing this news, I was inclined to make an excuse for lingering at Assen; but Alb was of opinion that it would be as safe, and far less dull, to go on. "Wilhelmina" was well ahead; and in any case we did not mean to stop the night at Meppel. If we saw Sir Alec's launch there, we could easily slip past, all passengers in the cabin and Hendrik at the helm; whereas, if we did not see her, she would not be able to see us.

We were in the province of Drenthe now, and it looked as little Dutch as might be. Even the canal had the air of disguising itself as the Long Water as Hampton Court, instead of being content to seem what it was: and after we had passed a few dignified mansions and farmhouses, we came to a region of squalid cottages with sullen-faced, short-haired women, and children shy as wild creatures of the wood, staring at us from low-browed doorways. It was not until we were far on our eight hours' journey to Meppel, that we slipped once more into a characteristic region of peace and plenty; marching lines of dark trees, with foregrounds of pink and azure flowers, or golden grain; mossy, thatched roofs, and red tiles crusted with golden lichen. But fortunately for the disposal of our toy supply, renewed at Assen, the watery way was starred with red, green, and blue barges inhabited by large families of violet-eyed, tow-headed infants. If by chance we encountered a childless barge, we glared resentment at the grown-ups. What were they thinking of, not to have babies, these people?

The meadow-ringed world of water and sky was all charm and grace and quaintness again, at Meppel and beyond, and I was in a mood to appreciate its beauty there, for we had a

glimpse of "Wilhelmina" in harbor, and apparently deserted. Passing within distant sight of her as she lay in harbor, Brederode gaily put on speed; for we had got beyond the "legal limit" obstructions of the Drenthe canal, into the freedom of the Ober Issel, a wide glitter of water, noble as the Frisian meers we had left.

Never was there an evening more exquisite than this, as we floated on through the sunset, with the old town of Zwolle for our night goal.

We were in the Swarzermeer, said Brederode; but there was nothing black about it, except the name. Sky and water had all the rich colors of an opal, and so clear were they, so alike in tints and brightness, that we seemed to hang in the midst of a rainbow bubble.

Yellow water-lilies lay on a surface of glass, like scattered gold, and the tall, thin grasses were gold-green wires in the level light of the sun. Each village we passed was a picture far beyond my art to paint; and hayricks under their thatches or piles of corn stacked in rows close to the water's edge, shone like a spray of fireworks as the darkening sky above slowly turned to a bank of hyacinths. Passing sails were gold at first, then brown, then pansy-purple, piercing the water with their sharp and deep reflections. The shore-line was crowded thick with pink and violet flower-spears, as if — said Nell — ranks of fairy soldiers had turned out in our honor for a review.

She and Phyllis stood near me, drinking in the delicious water-smell that mingled with the faint fragrance of closing lilies, and watching the sun as, beaten into copper, it sent a sudden stream of flame across the glittering crystal. I tried to feel alone with them, in a wonderful world which was for us three and nobody else except a few swans, and tiny water-creatures rustling among the reeds. But there was Alb at the wheel, looking handsomer and more inscrutable than I could ever look, if I practised for hours on end before a flattering

mirror. How could I help spoiling everything by wondering if Nell Van Buren were thinking about him while she talked with me fitfully, dreamily? And how could I help asking myself whether the image of the Viking did not come blundering between Phyllis's violet eyes and mine, when she seemed to look sweetly at me?

But it was the sort of evening when one thoroughly enjoys being restless and unhappy, and I reveled in my pain.

Little yellow birds, yellow as the lilies which made a blazing line of gold between green reeds and amethyst water, flitted fearlessly about the boat, until at last the sun went down like a ruby necklace falling into a crystal box. Then we moved through mysterious masses of purple shadow, with here and there a diamond-gleam, or the wing of a swan like the moon rising. And then our own little lights dipped trailing golden tassels under the surface of the water.

"Let us anchor," said Nell, at last, "and put out our lights again, and watch the moon rise. Oh, let us stay here all night, and wake early — early, to see the dawn come!"

I loved her for thinking of it, and so, I fear, did Alb. We dined on such picnic things as we happened to have on board, and when a pale light, like the reflection of pearls in a mirror, began to tremble in the east, out went the lights. The moon rose, and Phyllis let me hold her hand, which would have made me happy if I hadn't been almost sure she was feeling sisterly. And afterwards I dreamed about both girls. They were both in love with me, and, after all, I was in love with some one else whose name I did not seem to know, of whose face I could call up no memory.

It was Alb who waked me by pounding on the door of my cabin on "Waterspin," and shouting ——

"Get up, if you want to see the sunrise."

So I bounded out of bed, wishing I could recall that dream-face, just to make sure whether or no it was more beautiful

than either of the girls'. And by the time I had dressed, and gone across to "Mascotte's" deck, the two I loved were on deck also, with the first light of dawn shining in their eyes.

What did it matter that we had engaged rooms at Zwolle, which we had not occupied? We breakfasted there instead, and saw a beautiful water-gate, together with a few other good and very ancient things, about which Alb seemed to know a great deal.

There were no signs of "Wilhelmina," and my heart felt light as we went through a great lock into the Geldern Yssel, which would bear us to Holland's most beautiful province, Gelderland.

XXVIII

MY luck was out in Gelderland.

We had a good day, teuf-teufing to pretty little Dieren, big white clouds swimming with us in sky and under water, where they moved like shining fish down in the blue depths. Butterflies chased us, white, scarlet, and gold, whirling through the air as flower-petals blow in a high wind; and my thoughts flitted as they flitted, for I was too drunk with that elixir, joy of life, to care, as the others seemed to care, that Sir Philip Sidney died at the battle of Zutphen; that the River Geldern Yssel was cut thirteen years B.C. to connect the Rhine with something else; that by-and-by we were going to see Het Loo, the Queen's favorite place; or indeed anything else that could possibly be improving to the mind. I cared only that Nell and Phyllis were more beautiful than ever, and that I still might have a chance — with one of them.

"Let Alb score a little," I thought, "by his knowledge of history and Royalties past and present. *I'll* paint each of the girls a picture, and they'll forget that he exists."

But I did not yet know my Alb and his resources. I had forgotten that Gelderland is his special "pitch," the province he annexed at birth. Fate, however, did not forget.

We got to Appeldoorn that first night; and the palace of Het Loo is close to Appeldoorn, so we drove out and slept at a hotel near the palace gates. Here it was that the worm turned. In other words, Alb became a *persona grata*, while I remained an ordinary tourist.

Alb had influence in high quarters. He got up early, and

went off mysteriously to exert it, returning in triumph as the rest of us, including Tibe, were breakfasting on the broad veranda of the hotel in the woods. Anybody could go into the palace-grounds, but he had got permission to take his friends into the palace itself.

The girls were delighted at this, and so was the L.C.P., who flew off so quickly to get a "refill" for her note-book, that Tibe nearly upset an old peasant with a broad hat and silver ear-rings, who was eating and drinking of the best, at a table near ours.

All this feminine enthusiasm over Alb's idea piqued me just enough to keep me from joining the party. I volunteered for dog duty while the others saw the palace, and by special favor, Tibe (in leash) wandered reluctantly with me through the fragrant, green alleys of Het Loo. With me he saw shining lakes, and crossed miniature bridges guarded by mild stone lions, at which he smelled curiously; with me he sadly visited the Queen's bathing-place, and the pretty little dairy and farm, reminiscent of poor Marie Antoinette's beloved Trianon; and when we were joined by his mistress and the others he was ungrateful enough to pretend that I had not amused him.

Alb was in the ascendant, and the gilt had not had time to wear off the gingerbread before we arrived at Arnhem. We got there in a day from Appeldoorn, by going back over our own tracks as far as Dieren, where the beautiful little canal seemed to welcome us again, as if we were old friends. Through the thick reeds on either side we made a royal progress, a wave of water swiftly marching ahead to give them news of our approach, so that, as we came toward them, the nearest might bow before us, bending their graceful green heads down, down, under the water, and staying there until we had passed on.

It was like a journey through a long water-garden,

exquisitely designed in some nobleman's park, until a thunderstorm rolled up to darken the landscape, and send Phyllis for protection to her "brother's" side. I should certainly have asked her, there and then, to forget the Viking, if a tree near by had not been struck by lightning at that instant, and Nell, in her sudden pallor and stricken silence, had not been more beautiful than I had seen her yet.

I did not remember until we had been settled for a night and part of a day at a hotel with a view and a garden, that Alb was more at home in Gelderland than elsewhere in Holland. But he was treated with marked respect at the Bellevue, and people took off their hats to him in the street with irritating deference. We went about a good deal in the town, seeing historic inns and other show things (the best of which was a room once occupied by Philip the Second's Duke of Alva), therefore I had many opportunities of increasing my respect for Alb as a personage of importance, if I had been inclined to profit by them; and on top of this arrived his automobile from some unknown lair. There were some famous drives to be taken in the neighborhood of Arnhem, he explained in that quiet way of his, and he had thought it would be pleasant to take them in his car.

We started out in it on the second morning, and hardly had we left the big pleasure-town with its parks and villas, when we plunged into forests as deep, as majestic, as those round Haarlem and The Hague; forests tunneled with long green avenues of silver-trunked beeches, where the light was the green light which mermaids know. Here and there rose the fine gateways and distant towers of some great estate, and Brederode told us that Gelderland was famous for its old families and houses, as well as for the only hills in Holland.

"Fifty or sixty years ago," said he, "the nobility of Gelderland was so proud that no one who wasn't noble was allowed to buy an estate and settle here."

"Allowed!" exclaimed Nell. "How could they be prevented if they had money and an estate was for sale?"

Brederode smiled. "There were ways," he answered. "Once a rich banker of Amsterdam thought he would like to retire and have a fine house in aristocratic Gelderland. He bought a place, and wished to build a house to please his fancy; but no architect would make his plans, nobody would sell him bricks or building material of any kind, and he could get no workmen. Every one stood in too great awe of the powerful nobles. So you see, boycotting isn't confined to Ireland — or America."

"What happened in the end?" asked Nell. "I do hope the man didn't give in."

"Dutchmen don't, even to each other," said Alb. "The banker was as obstinate as his enemies. He went to enormous expense, got everything outside boycot limits, put up temporary buildings on his place for workmen from Rotterdam, fed them and himself from Rotterdam, and so in the end his house was built. But things are different in Gelderland now. People who were rich then are poor, and glad of any one's money. Arnhem is as cosmopolitan as The Hague, though it has the same curious Indian-Dutch set you find there, keeping quite to itself. A good many of the famous old places have been sold in these days to the *nouveaux riches*, but some are left unspoiled, and I'm going to show you one of them."

With that he drove his car through a wide, open gateway, a lodge-keeper saluting as we went by.

"Oh, but how do you know we may go in?" asked Phyllis.

"I'm sure we may," said Brederode.

"Are strangers allowed?" the L.C.P. questioned him.

"Harmless ones, like us."

Far away a house was in sight, a beautiful old house, built of mellowed red brick, its great tower and several minor turrets mirrored in a lily-carpeted lake which surrounded it

on two sides, like an exaggerated moat. "Fifteenth century," said Brederode. "But the big tower dates from twelve hundred and fifty."

We all stared in respectful awe of age and majesty, as Alb stopped the car at a small iron gate about two hundred yards from the house. The gate, guarded by giant oaks, led through a strip of shadowy park to a glorious labyrinth of rose-gardens, and gardens entirely given up to lilies of every imaginable variety, while beyond these was a water-garden copied from that of the Generalife, which I saw last year at Granada. Nor was this all of Spanish fashion which had been imitated. Pedro the Cruel's fountain-perforated walks in the Alcazaar of Seville had been copied too, and were put in operation for our amusement by a gardener with whom Brederode had a short confab. When we passed again through the rose and lily gardens, which were in a valley or dimple between two gentle hills, all three of the ladies were presented with as many flowers as they could carry, and Alb informed them that they would find more, of other varieties, waiting for them in the car.

"What a divine place!" exclaimed Nell, as we came once more to the little gate whence we had the double picture of the house and its reflection in the lake. "I don't see how there could be any lovelier one, even in England. How I should like to live in that wonderful old house! I'd have my own room and a boudoir in the thirteenth-century tower."

"Would you care to go in?" Alb asked, looking more at Phyllis than at Nell.

Nell flushed and left Phyllis to answer. "It would be quite like a fairy tale; but of course we can't, as the people of the house are evidently occupying it."

"All the better," said Brederode. "The lady of the house will receive us and give us tea."

"No, no!" cried Nell. "It would be horried to intrude upon her."

"You'll find she won't consider it an intrusion," Alb insisted. "In fact, I called yesterday and said I was bringing you out to-day, so it is an invitation."

The hall was stone paved, with glorious oak walls and a wonderful ceiling. There were a few Persian rugs, which must have been almost priceless, a quantity of fine old portraits, and two or three curious suits of armor. Beyond was a Chinese room, done in the perfect taste of a nation which loves and understands Oriental treasures; and then we came into a white-and-gold paneled boudoir, sparsely but exquisitely furnished with inlaid satinwood which I would wager to be genuine Sheraton.

In this room sat a woman who rose to welcome us, a woman worthy of her surroundings. Her dress was nothing more elaborate than black-and-white muslin, but with the piled silver of her hair, her arched, dark brows and cameo features, her great eyes and her noble figure, she looked a princess.

"Ah, Rudolph," she exclaimed, in the English of an Englishwoman born and bred, "how glad I am that you could come, and bring the friends of whom you have written me so often."

"My mother," Brederode said; and introduced us.

I am not ashamed to confess that I was tongue-tied. *What* had he written? How much had he told? In what way had he described — some of us?

Nell, who usually has some original little thought to put into words, apparently had no thoughts at all; or they lay too deep for utterance. The L.C.P. was taciturn too, which was prudent on her part, as this exquisite lady had probably heard her son speak of his Scotch friend Lady MacNairne. Had she ever met Aunt Fay, I knew that Alb was too wise, if not too loyal, to have brought us into her power; still I did not feel safe enough to be comfortable. And even if I had been personally at ease, I should have been too busy with my own

thoughts to do credit to myself or country in conversation. As I sipped caravan tea from a flower-like cup of old Dresden, I wondered what were Nell's sensations on beholding the home and mother of the despised skipper whom it had been her delight to snub and tease.

Evidently he is adored, and looked up to as the one perfect being, by his mother, who would hardly have smiled as graciously on the beautiful Miss Van Buren, could some imp have whispered in her ear how that young lady treated her host, when he was nobody but a poor skipper on board a motor-boat. Through some careless word which gave a turn to the conversation, I discovered that Liliendaal is not the only house reigned over by Jonkheer Brederode, alias Alb. There's one at The Hague, but they "find Liliendaal pleasant in summer."

Indeed, it appears to me that "pleasant" is only a mild and modest word for the place; yet its owner can cheerfully desert it, week after week, to rub along as a mere despised Albatross on board a tuppenny ha'penny motor-boat, running about the canals of Holland.

Of course, he is in love, which covers a multitude of hardships. But it isn't as clear as it used to be, which Angel he is in love with. Perhaps the latest snubbing was the last drop in his cup, which caused the whole to overflow, and he had to fill it up again — for another. He poured scorn upon me, in our first passage of arms, for being in love with two girls at once; but how much more poetical and at the same time more generous to love two at a time than not to love one well enough to know your own mind!

In any case, it was Phyllis who shone on the occasion of our call at Liliendaal, and it was she who seemed to make the impression upon the gracious mother. Whether it was the fact that she is English, or whether it was because she could talk to her hostess — as if she knew them — about

It was Phyllis who shone at Liliendaal

various distinguished titled beings whom the lady of Liliendaal had not seen for a long time; or whether it was because Phyllis once had a cousin who wrote a book about the Earls of Helvelyn (the lady's father was an Earl of Helvelyn) at all events the honors were for Phyllis; and if Alb really had changed his mind about the two girls, as the L.C.P. is continually saying, he ought to have been pleased.

Phyllis and my alleged aunt were both particularly gracious to him on the way back to Arnhem, as if he had risen in their esteem now that they realized what an important man he is; but afterwards when I accused the L.C.P. of this piece of snobbishness, she vowed that it was only because they both realized how much he was giving up for the sake of — somebody.

Just because I could not be sure which one the somebody was, and whether he were more likely to prevail, after this *coup d'état*, I was uneasy in my mind, with the new knowledge of Alb's greatness. What are my dollars to his beautiful old houses, and a mother who is the daughter of an English earl? I suppose these things count with girls, even such adorable girls as Nell Van Buren and Phyllis Rivers.

A thing that happened the same evening has not relieved my anxiety.

At the Hotel Bellevue, each room on the floor where we live, has its own slip of balcony, separated from the next by a partition. I was sitting on mine, after we had all said good-night to each other, smoking a cigarette and waiting for the moon to rise, an act which she selfishly postpones at this time of the month, so as to give her admirers as much trouble and as little sleep as possible.

Suddenly I heard Phyllis's voice on the other side of the balcony partition.

"Dearest," she was saying dreamily, "isn't it strange how, on a night like this, you seem to see things clearly, which have been dark before?"

"It isn't so very strange," Nell answered practically. "The moon's coming up. And that's a sign we ought to be going to bed."

"I didn't mean that," said Phyllis. "I mean, there's a kind of *influence* on such a beautiful night, which makes you see into your own heart."

"What do you see?" asked Nell.

I wanted to know what, as much as Nell did, and a great deal more, judging from her tone. But unfortunately I had no right to try and find out, so I got up, and scraped my chair and prepared to go indoors. But I had forgotten to shut my match-box when I lighted a cigarette a few minutes before, and now I knocked it off the table where it had been lying, scattering over the floor every match I had left in the world.

If they intended to say anything really private, I had made noise enough to prevent them from doing it; so I thought I might conscientiously remain and pick up some of the matches. The *personnel* of the hotel had gone to its beds, therefore, if I wanted to smoke later, it must be these matches or none.

"After all, I'm not quite sure what I *do* see, when I come to ask myself, like that, in so many words," said Phyllis. "I do wish you'd advise me. Will you, dear?"

"Of course, if I can," came the answer, a little shortly.

"Well, supposing *you* cared more than you thought you ought, for a man it couldn't be right to care for at all, because he belonged to some one else, what would you do?"

"Try to stop caring for him," said Nell.

"That's what I think, too; only it might be hard, mightn't it? Do you suppose it would be easier if a girl did her best to learn to love another man, who was free to care for her, and did seem to care for her, so as to take her mind off the — the *forbidden* man?"

No answer. (I realized that they could not have heard the

falling match-box, and I was at my window-door now, going in. But the door is a Dutch door, which means that it is cleaned and varnished every day; and the varnish stuck.)

"You might tell me what you think, Nell. You have had so much experience, in serials."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nell. "I — I *hate* you, Phil!"

Their door evidently did not stick, for suddenly it slammed, and I guessed that Nell had rushed in and banged it shut behind her.

Now, it is the next day but one after this episode, and we are at Utrecht, after having visited an old "kastel" or two more in the neighborhood of Arnhem, and then following the Rhine where it winds among fields like a wide, twisted ribbon of silver worked into a fabric of green brocade. Its high waves, roughened by huge side-wheel steamers, spilt us into the Lek; and so, past queer little ferries and a great crowded lock or two, where Alb used his Club flag, we came straight to the fine old city of which one hears and knows more, somehow, than of any other in Holland.

I planned to do a little painting here; but, after all, I don't seem to take as much interest in composing pictures as in trying to puzzle out the meanings of several things.

I suppose a man never can hope to understand women; but even a woman sometimes fails to understand another woman. For instance, goaded by unsatisfied curiosity to know, not only my own fate, but everybody else's fate, all round, I was tempted to take advantage of nephewhood, and put the case, as I saw it, to the L.C.P.

I ventured to tell her what I overheard between the girls on their balcony.

"Now, you must know," I said, "that I'm in love with Phyllis."

"I thought it was Nell," said she.

"So did I, for a while; but I've discovered that it's Phyllis. And I shall be very much obliged to you if you can tell me something. In fact, if you *can*, your dear nephew Ronny will present his aunt with a diamond ring."

"You mean if I tell you what you want to hear."

"No. It must be what you honestly think."

"I don't want a diamond ring," said she, which surprised me extremely. It was the first time anything worth having has been mentioned which she did not want, and, usually, ask for.

"A pearl one, then," I suggested in my astonishment.

"I don't want a pearl one — or any other one, so you can save yourself the trouble of working through a long list," replied the lady who is engaged to be my obliging relative. "But go on, and ask what you were going to ask. Anything I can do for you, as an aunt, I will. I am paid for it."

This grew "curioser and curioser," as Alice had occasion to remark in her adventures. But having embarked upon my narrative, I went on ——

"Whom do you think Phyllis meant when she spoke of trying to learn to love a man who seemed to love her? Was it Alb, or —— "

"Mr. Robert van Buren, perhaps you were going to say," cut in the L.C.P.

"No, I don't mean him," I answered hurriedly. "Modesty forbids me to mention the name in my mind."

"But it was given to you by your sponsors in baptism. Will it make you very unhappy if I say I don't think that *was* the name in her mind?"

"I shall have to bear it," I said. "But, of course, I shall be unhappy."

"We all seem to be unhappy lately," remarked the L.C.P.

"Except you."

"Yes, except me, of course," she responded. "Why should I be unhappy? Tibe loves me."

"You don't deserve it; but so do we all," said I.

She brightened.

"You are harmful, but necessary," I went on. "We are used to you. We have even acquired a taste for you, I don't know why, or how. But you have an uncanny, unauntlike fascination of your own, which we all feel. At times it is even akin to pain."

"Oh well, the pain will soon be over," said she. "We're at Utrecht now. Soon we'll be going to Zeeland, from Zeeland back to Rotterdam; and that's the end of the trip — and my engagement. It will be 'good-by' then."

"I feel now as if it would be good-by to everything," I sighed. "I never nursed a fond gazelle —— "

"You tried to nurse two," said she. "You're like the dog who dropped the substance for the shadow."

"Which is which, please? — though to specify would perhaps be ungallant to both. Besides, I haven't dropped either of them. If Phyllis is lost to me, I may still be able to fall back on Nell, whom nobody else seems to claim at present."

"Oh, don't they?" murmured the L.C.P.

"Do they?"

"She may have left dozens of adorers at home, to pick up again when she goes back. She's a beautiful girl," said her chaperon.

"Radiantly so, and I used to think also possessed of a beautiful disposition. But since she flew out at poor little Phyllis, who was asking for advice and comfort, and cried, 'I hate you, Phil — ' Now, you're a woman. What had Phyllis said to put her in a rage?"

The L.C.P. laughed. "Enough to put a saint in a rage," said she. "And Nell isn't a saint. But they've been more devoted to each other than ever, since, so she must have repented and apologized, and been forgiven, before the moon went down.

Oh, you poor puzzled creature! I wouldn't be a *man* for anything!"

And that was all the satisfaction I could get from her. I remain as much in the dark as ever. But Robert van Buren, his sisters, and his fiancée are arriving immediately, and perhaps I may get enlightenment during the visit. I ought to have some reward, since it is through me that the Viking is coming with the females of his kind, at this particular time.

In a moment of quixotic generosity at Enkhuisen, I promised Phyllis, as a newly adopted, if reluctant, brother, that I would make everything right for her. Afterwards, I was inclined to repent of the plan which had sprung, Minerva-like full-grown and helmeted, from my suffering brain. But it was too late then. I had to keep my word, for I was sure that, deep down in her mind, Phyllis was expecting me to perform some miracle.

Rather than disappoint her — and lower my self-esteem — I had a talk with Robert the day he was leaving. Not an intimate talk, for we aren't on those terms; but I managed to get out of him that he was parting from us before he had intended because of a letter from the fiancée.

"Young ladies are a little exacting when they are engaged, I suppose," said the poor fellow. "They feel they have more right than others to a man's society."

Then it was that I asked why he didn't bring Freule Menela, chaperoned by the twins, to Utrecht instead of waiting until we had got as far as Zeeland, which the fiancée might think too long a journey with such an object in view. He said that he would ask her.

"Don't seem too anxious," said I, airily. "And don't tell her you want her to be better acquainted with your cousin and step-cousin. Just remark that it will be a jolly excursion, eh? And you might add that Brederode and I — particularly I — are awfully keen on seeing her."

"Very well, I will give that message," said he. And I think he probably did give it, or something like it; for Nell had a telegram from him, while we were still doddering about in Friesland, asking if he might bring the ladies on a visit to Utrecht.

Now, it is "up to me" to carry out that plan made on the impulse of an unselfish moment.

Moral: do not have unselfish moments.

XXIX

I BELIEVE that, in the dark ages, I was rather a good little boy. I used often to tell the truth, and the whole truth, even when most inconvenient to my pastors and masters. I gave pennies to the poor, unless I very much wanted them myself; I said "Now — I — Lay — Me," every night, and also in the morning till advised that it was inappropriate; and I sang in a boy's choir, so beautifully and with such a soulful expression in my eyes, that people used to pat my curls, and fear that I was destined to die young.

In those days, or even until a few weeks ago no one who looked at me would have believed me capable of plotting against young and innocent girls, annexing aunts on the hire system, or deluding uncles-in-law with misleading statements. Yet these things I have done, and worse; for I have kept my word to Phyllis Rivers.

If I must commit a crime, my artistic sense bids me do it well; and then, of course, when one has started in a certain direction, one is often carried along a little farther than one intended to go at first.

That was what happened to me, in the affair of Robert van Buren and his fiancée.

I was pledged to Phyllis and myself to free the Viking somehow — anyhow. It was rash of me to give this pledge, also it was quixotic; and many hours did not pass after making it, before I was seized with regret, and convictions that I had been an ass.

Exactly how I was going to do the deed did not occur to me at the time, but I had an idea which fitted in with my

other villainies so well, that it seemed really a pity not to add it to the richly colored pattern.

It was for this reason that I dreaded returning to the Hotel du Pays Bas from a walk about Utrecht, knowing as I did that the van Buren party would have arrived.

I stayed out, sketching, as long as there was any light, and got a few good bits of the old town; a shadowed glimpse of one of Utrecht's strange canals, unique in Holland, with its double streets, one above the other; an impression of the Cathedral spire, seen beyond a series of arched bridges; a couple of fishermen bringing up a primitive net, fastened on four branches, and sparkling as it came out of the water, like a spider-web spun of crystal.

I was careful not to appear till dinner-time; but one is obliged in self-defense to dine early in Holland, because what seems early to a foreigner seems late to a Dutchman. At seven o'clock I went to the L.C.P.'s sitting-room (it has become a regular thing for her to have a sitting-room), and behold, they were all assembled.

Nell was plainly dressed in the simplest kind of a white frock, but Phyllis had made quite a toilet. Poor child! I could guess why. She need not, however, have given herself the pains. The fiancée, compared with her, was like a withered lemon beside a delicately ripening peach.

The van Buren twins are delicious creatures; but they did not count in the little drama. Besides, they are, in any case, too young for drama. They are just beginning to rehearse for the first act of life; and I think for them it will be a pretty pastoral, never drama or tragedy, or even lively comedy.

I knew from Phyllis's description what sort of girl the fiancée would turn out to be, except that I didn't expect to find her quite so smart. Her dress, and the hat she had put on for the hotel dinner, might have come from the Rue de la Paix; which was all the more credit to her, as I have heard a

dozen times if I have heard it once, that she is very poor — as poor as she is proud.

Now was my time to set the ball rolling; and valiantly I gave it the first kick. I feigned to be much taken at first sight with the young lady from The Hague. At once I flung myself into conversation with her, in which we were both so deeply absorbed, that when the L.C.P. suggested going down to dinner, nobody can have been surprised when I said, "Please, all whom it may concern, I want to sit next to Freule Menela van der Windt at the dinner table." Indeed, most of the party have long passed the stage of being surprised at anything I do; a state of mind to which I have carefully trained them. The Viking, however, has not often seen me at my best, so he stared at this audacity, but on second thoughts decided not to be displeased.

Neither was the fiancée displeased. I did not attribute her pleasure to the power of my manly charms; but the young lady is the sort of young lady to be complimented by almost any marked attention from any man, especially when other girls, prettier than herself, are present.

I continued to absorb myself in Freule Menela.

She has, I soon discovered, a veneering of intelligence, and a smattering of information on a number of subjects useful in a drawing-room. We talked about Dutch art, and French art, and so many facts was the maiden able to launch at my head, that the lovely pink-and-white twins gazed at their future sister-in-law with ingenuous admiration.

Evidently she had gleaned from Robert all he had to tell about me, as well as about the other members of the party, for she is not the sort of girl to lay herself out for strangers unless she considers them worth while.

Apparently she did consider me worth while; and during dinner she had hardly a word for the Viking, who sat on her other side; but that was all the better for him, because it gave

him a chance to talk across the table to Phyllis, and to look at her when he was sitting dumb.

"There's going to be an illumination this evening," said Brederode. "You know the parks and gardens you admired so much last night, as we came through the canal into Utrecht? Well, there will be colored lights there; and a walk along the towing-path would be rather nice, if any one feels inclined for it."

"Oh, do let's go!" exclaimed Phyllis; and the twins echoed her enthusiastically.

That was enough for Brederode, though neither Nell nor the L.C.P. replied; and I asked myself by whose side he was planning to walk. Had he proposed the excursion with an eye to monopolizing the English or the American Angel?

I stifled the pang which I could not help feeling at the thought that he should have either, and in a low voice asked Freule Menela van der Windt if I might be her cavalier, in order to continue our very interesting argument? I had already forgotten what the last one was about; but that was a detail.

Had she been a little less well-bred, I think she would have bridled. As it was, she really did smirk a little, in a ladylike way.

We took cabs, and drove out past all that was commercial, to the place where the towing-path began to be prettiest, and the illuminations the most fantastic.

I was in a cab with the fiancée and her prospective sisters-in-law; but when we got out to walk, I self-sacrificingly flung the twins to the Chaperon, and, alone with the young lady from The Hague (she never lets you forget for five minutes together that she is from The Hague) I slackened my pace and regulated hers to it, that we might drop behind the others.

The towing-path and the canal were beautiful and fantastic as some night picture of Venice. A faint mist had risen out of

the water at sunset, and the red, green, and gold lamps suspended from trees and barges seemed to hang in it like jewels caught in a veil of gauze. The trees arched over us tenderly, bending as if to listen to words of love. The soft rose-radiance that hovered in the air made lovely faces irresistible, and plain ones tolerable. Any normal man would have been impelled to propose to the nearest pretty girl, whether he had been previously in love with her or not, and the nearest pretty girl would have said "yes — yes," without stopping to think about her feelings to-morrow.

Freule Menela van der Windt is not pretty; but without her *pince-nez*, she looked almost piquant in the pink lights and blue shadows which laced our features as we passed, for which I was devoutly thankful, as it made my task comparatively easy. I found her softer, more feminine, more sympathetic, than she had been in the hotel. She would, she said, like to see America; and that gave me my chance. It was a pity, I told her, that such an intelligent and broad-minded young lady should not travel about the world before settling down in such a small, though charming, country as Holland.

Instantly she caught me up, with a little laugh. "Why should you take it for granted that I am going to 'settle down' anywhere?"

"Oh," said I, rather embarrassed at this direct attack, "I — er — was told that Mr. van Buren had been lucky enough to persuade you to live in Rotterdam."

"Never!" exclaimed Freule Menela, deeply interested in this conversation about herself. "I will never live in Rotterdam!"

"But," I ventured, with an air of eagerness, "if you should marry a man whose interests are in Rotterdam —— "

"It isn't at all decided that I shall marry such a man," she answered sharply.

"Not decided?" I repeated anxiously. "Look here, you

know, I don't think it's fair to other men that it should be taken for granted you're engaged, if you're not really."

"Why should it matter to other men?" asked the lady.

"Oh, well, it might, you see. There might — er — be some man who met you for the first time after he'd heard of your engagement, and who for his own peace of mind didn't dare let himself admire your brilliant talents as much as he would like to."

Now, I had got as far as I intended to go. Some dim idea of rescuing the Viking from the girl he doesn't love, to give him to the girl he does (and I do), had been floating in my mind ever since that stormy night at Enkhuisen. I had thought that Freule Menela was the sort of girl who might drop the meat for the sake of the shadow; but having indicated the presence of a floating, ghostly shadow — which might belong to any one or no one — I had no idea of advancing further, even to bestow happiness on Phyllis.

I had argued with my conscience, "If she's a woman who's ready to throw over the man she's engaged to, just because he isn't very rich or particularly eligible in her eyes, and because some other vague person looming on the horizon has more money than Number One, why, it's a sure sign that she accepted Number One because she couldn't get any one else, therefore she doesn't deserve to keep him, and she does deserve not only to see him slip away, but to see the shadow go with him."

However, I had not taken Freule Menela's talents into due account — or my own failings."

"Is there such a man?" she asked.

"There might be," I cautiously repeated. "The question is, are you engaged to Mr. van Buren, or are you not?"

"There has been an understanding between his family and mine, for many years, that some day we should marry," she answered. "And, of course, he's very fond of me, though you

might not think it from his manner. He often appears to feel more interest in women for whom he cares nothing, than in me, to whom he is devoted. That is a characteristic of men who have his reserved nature."

"I'm afraid I don't understand reserved natures," said I. "If I care for any one, I can't help showing it."

"I have often thought," went on Freule Menela, "of telling Robert van Buren that he and I are not suited to each other. My ideal man is very different. And besides, as I said, *nothing* could induce me to settle down in Rotterdam."

"You might make that the determining point," I suggested, "if you were looking for an excuse to save his feelings."

"Do you really think so?" she asked.

"I certainly do. Then you could leave him the choice. Rotterdam, without you; the more lively place, with you. Oh! don't you think, for your sake and his, you ought to do this at once?"

"And a little for the sake of — the other man?" she asked, archly.

I dared not inquire, stonily, "What other man?" lest the work I had accomplished should be destroyed in a single stroke. So I said ——

"Yes, and for the sake of the other man."

"You believe it would really matter to him?"

She looked up so anxiously as she put this question that, quite apart from the interests of Phyllis Rivers, I could not have dashed hers, or any other woman's hopes, by giving an unchivalrous answer. Let come what might, I could not deliberately bring the pallor of humiliation to a female face, especially after words of mine had once caused it to glow with pleasure.

"How could I believe otherwise?" I demanded; and my tone sounded almost too sincere in my own ears.

For a moment Freule Menela van der Windt did not an-

swer, and I hoped that her thoughts had hopped to some other branch of the subject; but presently she broke out, as if impelled by impulse to utter her thought to a congenial soul.

"Isn't it strange how sometimes one seems to know a person one has only just met, better than another, with whom one has been intimate for years?"

"That is often so," I hurried to assure her, with the idea of establishing the commonplaceness of such an experience.

"You feel it, too?" Her eyes were fixed on me, and I answered "Yes," before I had time to decide whether, at this point, it would not be safer not to feel it.

"I've often been told that American men are very impulsive. But — are there many like you?" asked Freule Menela.

"Lots," I said quickly.

"Oh, then it's really true that it is quite a usual thing among your country people, for a man to tell a girl he cares for her, when he has seen her only once?"

"I — er — really don't know about that," I answered, beginning to be disturbed in soul.

"You know only how it is with yourself?" Freule Menela murmured, with a girlish laugh that betrayed suppressed excitement. "Well, Mr. Starr, I think it would be foolish to pretend to misunderstand. I have heard much about you — perhaps you have heard a little of me? — yet you have taken me by storm. The thing I love best is art. You are a great artist — and you are a man of the world. You have all the fire of genius — and geniuses have a right to do things which other men may not do. I believe you have made me more interested in you, in these last two hours we have spent together, than I have been in any one else in as many years. And because of you, and what you have said — so delicately yet so unmistakably — I am going now to take your advice about Robert."

Before I could stop her, even if I had had the courage and presence of mind, she walked quickly away from me, and

joined Phyllis and van Buren, who were sauntering a few yards ahead.

My brain whirled, and threatened to give way in the horror of the situation. I could have shouted aloud with the shrill intensity of a drowning man, "Alb, save me!" But Alb was far in front, strolling with the van Buren twins, while the one van Buren in whom he is really interested walked behind him with my temporary aunt. And in any case, he could have done nothing. Before my stunned wits had time to rebound, Phyllis the sweet and gentle had turned and flown to me, as if for refuge, like a homing dove threatened by a hawk.

"Brother dear," she whispered, "may I walk with you, please? Freule Menela says there is something she has been wanting all day to talk over with Mr. van Buren; so I thought I had better leave them alone, and drop behind with you — if you don't mind having me?"

"Mind!" I echoed in my turmoil of spirit. "It's a happy relief."

"I thought you seemed quite fascinated by Freule Menela," exclaimed the poor innocent one "I asked Mr. van Buren if he were not jealous."

"How unkind of you!"

"I didn't mean to be unkind — at least, I *hope* I didn't," said Phyllis. "Only, do you know, dear brother — since I am to confide my real feelings to you — I'm never quite sure of myself where that girl is concerned. I can't stand her. I'm *so* sorry for poor Mr. van Buren. What do you suppose he answered when I asked him that question about being jealous of you — that rather naughty question? He said, 'Would to Heaven she were his, not mine!'"

Had I been on St. Lawrence's gridiron, I could not have helped chortling.

"I'm not at all sure she isn't," I muttered, under my breath; but Phyllis caught the words.

"What do you mean?" she gasped. "Oh, it *can't* be you mean anything, *do* you?"

"Well, anyhow, I mean that it's very likely she won't long be his," I explained, fired with anxiety to please the girl at any cost.

"It sounds too glorious to be true. It *can't* be true! But if it could! It's no use saying I wouldn't be glad — for poor Mr. van Buren's sake; he's so much too nice for her — mercenary, conceited, selfish little creature."

"Right, on every count," said I.

"I don't quite understand you," said Phyllis. "But I can't help feeling that, if anything splendid does happen, it will be all through you — somehow. You promised me, didn't you? — well, I don't know exactly what you promised; but it made me feel happy and sure everything would come out well, that night when you said you'd like to have me for a sister."

"*Did* I say that?" I asked in surprise.

"*Didn't* you? I thought —— "

"Go on thinking so, then," I sighed; "and anything else that will make you happy — little sister."

"Thank you. Now I know, by the mysterious way you're looking at me, that you *have* done something. I believe you made him — I mean Mr. van Buren — come to see us again sooner than he intended to."

"Perhaps. And perhaps I made him bring Freule Menela with him."

"Did you? I wish — but no. I mustn't think of that."

"Wait a few hours and then think what you like," said I. Yet I spoke gloomily. I could see where the Viking was to come in. But I could not so clearly see how I was to get out.

We walked a very long way before any one seemed to wonder where we were going, and why we should be going there; but at last we came to a tea-garden, or a beer-garden, or both; and the L.C.P. said that we must stop and give Tibe a bowl of milk.

Not a member of the party who did not appear singularly absent-minded, on stopping and grouping with the others again, not excepting Tibe himself; but his absent-mindedness was caused only by the antics of a water-rat, which he would have liked to see added to his milk. When it occurred to him to drink the milk, unenriched by such an addition, we were all eating pink and white ices, and Dutch cakes that must have been delicious to those who had no Freule Menela sticking in their throats.

Phyllis walked beside me all the way back to the hotel, and was dearer than ever now that, through my own quixotic act, I saw her rapidly becoming unattainable. But, as the ladies said good-night to us at the foot of the stairs, Freule van der Windt contrived to whisper, as she slipped her hand into mine — "For better for worse, I've taken *your* advice, Mr. Starr. I am absolutely *free*."

"How did you manage it?" I heard myself asking.

"Robert *insisted* on living in Rotterdam. He wouldn't even consent to winter at The Hague, though it's so near; so his blood is on his own head."

"And joy in his heart," I might have added. But I did not speak at all.

"Haven't you *anything* to say?" she asked coyly; though her eyes, as they fixed mine, were not coy, but eager; and I felt, eerily, that she was wondering whether the millions, of which she'd heard, were in English pounds or American dollars.

I hesitated. If I replied "Nothing," she would probably snatch Robert back from Phyllis lips, and I had not gone so far along the path of villainy to fail my Burne-Jones Angel now.

"I will tell you what I have to say to-morrow," I answered, in a low voice; and then I am afraid that, to be convincing, I almost squeezed her hand.

XXX

WE were called early in the morning, to take the twins and Freule Menela — the fiancée no longer — for a drive through Utrecht, to see the beautiful parks and the Cathedral before starting on the day's journey. Since the making of this plan, however, many things were changed. Robert and Menela were both "disengaged," and how they would think it decorous to behave to each other, how the twins would treat the lady (if the truth had been revealed), remained to be seen. If I had had no personal interest at stake, I should have found pleasure in the situation, and in watching how things shaped themselves; but, as it was, I realized that I might be one of the things to be shaped, and that I should be lucky if I were allowed to shape myself.

I thought it well to be late to breakfast, lest the erstwhile fiancée and I should meet *en tête-à-tête*; and it was evident, at a glance, that Lisbeth and Lilli already knew all. The admirable Menela had probably told them in their bedroom over night, thus giving the pair plenty of solid food for dreams; and the pretty creatures were pale, self-conscious, and nervous, not knowing how to bear themselves after the earthquake which had shaken the relationship of years.

Robert also was uneasy; but, to my regret, emotion enhanced his good looks. What I had done had not been done for his benefit. I had not jeopardized my happiness to make him more attractive, to give fire to his eyes, and an expression of manly self-control striving with passion, to his already absurdly perfect features. Though, plainly, he was undergoing

some mental crisis, he held his feelings so well in leash that no outsider could have judged whether he were the saddest or the happiest of men, and his sisters watched him anxiously, hoping to receive a guiding clue for their own behavior.

As for Freule Menela, she was as composed as ever, and had a self-satisfied air, as though, having slept on it, she was more pleased than ever with the course she had adopted.

Phyllis knew nothing yet, except what she had gleaned from me last night, I was sure of that; but I was not so sure about Alb, who wore a clouded brow. Whether he was worrying over his own affairs, or whether friend Robert had commandered his hero's sympathy, I could not guess, and dared not ask. Nor had I much time to speculate upon Alb's business, for I saw by Freule Menela's eye that my own was pressing, and all my energies were bent in steering clear of her during the good-by excursion through Utrecht.

Luckily, the party distributed itself in two carriages, and though I could not resist the fair Menela's "Come with me, Mr. Starr," fortunately the L.C.P. jumped in with Tibe, whose mood was so obstreperous that clearly he did not find canal life relaxing. Then arose a discussion between Nell and Phyllis as to which should sit in the other carriage, and Nell came to us, wishing, perhaps, to avoid Alb, whose society seems of late to cast a blight of silence upon her.

"Now," said I to myself, "if the late fiancée can't wind her tentacles round a new victim in this vehicle, neither can Robert escape her toils by proposing to Phyllis in that one, surrounded by his family circle. If he doesn't seize his chance soon, he'll miss it forever; because once his Freule discovers that she isn't to be claimed by another, she'll find it convenient to change her mind about life in Rotterdam. I may be saint — or villain — enough to keep her dangling till sunset; but then, at latest, I shall have to cut her down; and woe to

any Viking who happens to lie about loose and unattached, when she falls to earth with a dull thud."

Far be it from the clever lady of The Hague to admit that there was a place on earth of which she did not know everything; and though I have reason to believe that she never saw Utrecht till yesterday, she was so busy telling us about it that we were behind the others in arriving on board "Mascotte," our appointed rendezvous.

I noticed instantly that Phyllis was not on deck, helping Alb to entertain the twins, as her kind soul would have prompted her to do. Of course, she might be below, in one of the cabins; but where was Robert? It was a coincidence that he, too, should be missing. Yet no one attempted to offer an explanation. Lilli and Lisbeth merely looked flurried and pink when Freule Menela came airily on board with me, and Alb appeared interested in giving instructions to Hendrik, who disputed respectfully with Tibe possession of countless yards of his beloved cotton waste.

At last, however, I began to wonder why we did not get away. The day's trip was to be a return to Amsterdam, not with the object of reviving impressions of that city, but for the pleasure of the run through the River Vecht, which Alb praised as the prettiest stream in the Netherlands, and named a miniature Thames. It was ten o'clock, and, as usual, we were timed to start at ten; but I did not consider it my place to ask the reason why, or any other question about starting. Mine, but to do or die — and keep out of reach of Freule Menela.

It was through Nell that the mystery was solved, as we stood chatting on deck.

"Where's Phil?" she inquired of the twins.

"Gone back to the hotel to find something she forgot to pack," said Lilli.

"And brother Robert has taken her," said Lisbeth, with a fleeting glance at the self-deposed fiancée

This revelation of Phyllis's diplomacy came upon me with a shock. She is such a simple-minded Angel; but I suppose all girls are alike in some ways. And she is so kind-hearted, she must have been anxious to put Robert out of his misery as soon as she could. Well, she couldn't have done it much sooner.

"There they come," cried Lilli. And perhaps I should have been tempted to search their faces for news if Freule Menela had not turned her back upon the advancing figures, and begun to talk, with an air of proprietorship, to me.

"It's found!" cried Phyllis, to all whom it might concern. "I was so — fond of it, I should have hated losing it. And it was *so* kind of Mr. van Buren to help me."

I wondered whether there were others on board beside myself who detected in this announcement a double meaning? Something in her voice told me that she really was thankful not to have lost the thing of which she was so fond, the thing for which she had gone back to the hotel, the thing Mr. van Buren had kindly helped her to find. But there was no chance for a self-sacrificing brother to question his sister. Freule Menela saw to that.

It was my luck at its worst, to be torn in my mind on this exquisite day on the Vecht. Once in a while it dimly comes back to me that, in a past existence unbrightened by Nell Van Buren and Phyllis Rivers, I came to Holland with the object of painting pictures. Never, since my arrival in the bright little country of wide spaces, have I had a keener incentive to improve the shining hours; but how can a man remember that he's an artist when the girl he loves has engaged herself to another man, and one of the few girls he never could love is rapidly engaging herself to him?

It was in self-defense, not a real desire for work, that I fled to "Waterspin" and screened myself behind easel and canvas. And then it was but to find that I had jumped from the frying-pan into the fire.

My move was made while "Mascotte" and her fat companion lay at rest, that Alb might buy fruit for us from a fruit boat; and Freule Menela also availed herself of the quiet interval.

"May I come and watch you paint?" she asked, in a tone which showed that vanity made her sure of a welcome.

I longed for the brutal courage to say that I could never work with an audience; but I remembered letting slip last night the fact that I constantly sat sketching on the deck of "Mascotte," during the most crowded hours of life.

I murmured something, with a smile which needed oiling; and, accepting the grudging help of my hand, she floated across with an affected little scream.

"I saw a lovely picture you painted for Miss Rivers," she said, when she was settled in a camp-stool at my side. "Will you do one for me?"

"With pleasure," I answered. "This one shall be for you. But if you want it to be good, we mustn't talk. I shall have to concentrate my mind on my work."

"Thanks for the compliment," she laughed. "I give you leave to forget me — for a little while."

So I did my best to take her at her word, and tried impressionist sketches of the charming and ever-changing scene, upon which her presence was the sole blot; the beautiful old houses set back from the river on flowery lawns, faded coats-of-arms glowing red and blue and gold over quaint doorways shaded by splendid trees; fairy villas rising from billows of pink peonies and green hydrangeas; humble cottages, with tiny window-panes of twinkling glass, shining out from bowers of late roses; dove-gray windmills beckoning across piles of golden hay; above, clouds like flocks of snowy sheep, racing along wide sky-pastures, blue with the blue of forget-me-nots; below, a crystal flood foaming white with water-lilies that dipped before the prow of our advancing boat.

Over this crust of pearl, poised always long-stemmed, yellow lilies, like hovering butterflies; and, in a clear space of water, each little wave caught the sun and sky reflection, so that it seemed rimmed with gold and set with a big, oval turquoise.

"Well — have I pleased you?" Freule Menela asked at last.

The moment had come for an understanding. With my two hands, unaided I had saved Phyllis, and now I must save — or lose — myself. Of course there was no choice which to do. I had played my fish and caught it, and as it was not the kind of fish I liked for dinner, I must tear it off the hook and throw it back into the sea, wriggling. I told myself that it was a bad, as well as an unattractive fish, that if I hadn't hooked it, most surely it would have bolted the beautiful little golden minnow I had been protecting. Still — still, there it was, smiling on the hook, that bad fish, trusting the hand which had caught and would betray it. It deserved nothing of that hand or any other hand; but suddenly, I found mine powerless.

"Phyllis, Phyllis," I groaned in spirit, "you will be my death, for to save you I caught this fish; now I may have to eat it, and it will surely choke me."

Before my eyes stretched a horrible vista of years, lived through with Freule Menela — mean little, vain, disloyal Freule Menela — by my side, contentedly spending my money and bearing my name, while I faded like a lovely lily on the altar of self-sacrifice.

In another instant I should have said yes, she had pleased me; she would have answered; and just because she is a woman I should have had to say something which she might have taken as she chose; so that it would have been all over for Ronald Lester Starr; but at this moment the two boats began to slow down. I suppose that Toon, at the steering-wheel of "Waterspin," must have received a message, which I

"Well—have I pleased you?" Freule Menela asked at last

was too preoccupied to hear; and as speed slackened, came the voice which others know as that of my Aunt Fay.

Never had it been so welcome, sounded so sweet, as now, when it brought my reprieve.

"Ronald dear," cooed the mock-Scottish accents, "you'd better get ready at once to lunch on shore, for Jonkheer Brederode has another surprise for us — and I know that by this time your hands, if not your face, are covered with paint."

Wonderful woman! It was as if inspiration had sent her to my rescue. Not that I am at all sure she would have laid herself out to rescue me from any snare, had she known of its existence; for though, before the watery world I am "Ronny dear" to her, she is not as considerate with me in private as she used to be when we first started.

We have been frank with each other at times, the L.C.P. and I, and the pot has said in plain words what it thinks of the kettle's true character. When the time comes for us to part it may be that her little ladyship will be still more frank, and let me know, in polite language, that seeing the last of her borrowed nephew is "good riddance of bad rubbish." Nevertheless, her extraordinary, though indescribable, cleverness has woven a kind of web about us all; and whether I am able to respect the L.C.P. or not, I was conscious of passionate gratitude to her as she arrested me with the bad fish half-way to my mouth.

The boats stopped at a private landing, small, but so remarkable that I thought for an instant the whole thing must be an optical illusion.

We had come to rest in the deep shadow of enormous trees. Leaning over the rail of a snug little harbor two dummy men in rakish hats and dark coats stared at the new arrivals with lack-luster eyes. And the dummies, and the wooden wall on which they were propped, with a strange painted motto consisting of snakes, and dogs, and sticks, and a yard measure,

were all repeated with crystal-clear precision in the green mirror of quiet water.

"How annoying, just as we were going to have another delicious talk!" exclaimed Menela.

"Yes," said I. "But it can't be helped. Where are we? Is this fairyland?"

"It must be the place of Heer Dudok de Wit," answered the young lady, snappily. "He is a wonderful man, and many people say that no visit to Holland can be complete without a visit to his house. He's a great character — has walked all over the world,. and brought back curiosities for his museum, to which he gives free admission. And from what I hear, there is nothing else he won't give, if asked for it — he's so generous — from a night's lodging or all his best peaches, up to a present of a thousand gulden to a distressed stranger. This can be no other house than his; and I believe Rudolph Brederode is a far-off cousin of Heer de Wit, just as Rudolph is of mine, on the other side. I don't see our host, though. Perhaps he is away on one of his walking tours."

"Or in bed," said I. "Taking a noon-day nap, to forget the heat."

"No, for one of his peculiarities is, never to go to bed. He hasn't been in bed for twenty-five years. I don't know how he sleeps — but, look! there he is now. I recognize him from photographs in newspapers."

My eyes followed her nod, which appeared to be aimed at the river. I looked for a boat, but spied a head floating among water-lilies.

It was not a loose head of some early Dutch martyr miraculously preserved — as seemed possible in a place of such surprises — for it smiled and bowed, and addressed Brederode as its dear Rudolph.

It's wet hair, glittering like silver in the water, was rather long, it's eyes were like brown jewels, it had faultless features,

not at all of a modern cast, but like those one sees in a seventeenth-century portrait; and it's smile, even when visible only as far down as the lower lip, was charming.

The famous Mr. Dudok de Wit, bobbing nearer, explained that he had unduly prolonged his daily swimming bath, owing to the sultriness of the day. As it was, he had been in the water no more than an hour or two, but he was delighted to see us, would come out at once, and expect us to lunch with him at Breukelen, which is the name of his place.

He did come out, in a neat bathing-suit, desiring us to follow him into the house, where we might amuse ourselves until he was dressed, wandering among his treasures in the drawing-room.

The luncheon in the quaint old house, the stroll through the grounds and the hour in the museum, were among Alb's successes; but I was past grudging it to him; besides, he flaunted no triumphant airs. Why should he, when Phyllis had eyes only for her Viking, and Nell, in a newly developed appreciation of her twin cousins, had no time to remember his existence?

I did think that she might have stretched out a hand to save me from Menela, but if she had any conception of what was going on, she thought me able to take care of myself, and I should have been left to the tender mercies of the creature I had freed had it not been for the L.C.P.

During the afternoon, when we had left Breukelen and were gliding on, along the lily-burdened river toward Amsterdam, she unobtrusively made it her business to protect me from the sallies of the enemy, even engaging that enemy herself, as if she were my squire at arms. Now, if never before, she was worth her weight in gold, and as I saw her politely entangle the unwilling Menela in conversation, I vowed to buy her a present worth having when we arrived in Amsterdam.

XXXI

WHEN a man sacrifices himself for a woman, he naturally likes to have the satisfaction of knowing that he has made a success; and I felt that a melancholy pleasure would be mine should I learn that Phyllis had profited by my kindness. It would have been flattering to my self-esteem, also, though perhaps disastrous to my ribs, if Robert van Buren had thrown himself upon my bosom, thanking me for his deliverance from bondage. I had to remind myself that he could not possibly know what he owed me, or I should have been unjust enough to accuse him of ingratitude.

A heavy shower came on while we were driving in open cabs through Amsterdam, therefore the moment we arrived at the well-remembered hotel of our last visit, the various members of the band had to skurry off to their rooms and change their drenched garments. As no plan of campaign had been arranged for the rest of the day — it was then past five — we did not meet again, as a party, until dinner-time, when we all came together with the exception of Brederode, who absented himself to dine with a friend.

It was the first time that he had been away, and to my surprise I discovered that, when a Mariner has carried an Albatross about with him week after week, he actually misses the creature if he mislays it. Somehow, we seemed to be at loose ends without Brederode. Lacking an organizer, nobody knew what to do; and if he had wished to enhance his value, he couldn't have chosen a better way. As if at a loss for any other subject of common interest, we fell to talking of the absent one

— all save Nell, who listened in silence, not once joining in until Freule Menela capped an anecdote of Robert's in praise of his hero, by remarking ——

"Of course Rudolph's brave enough; but that's no particular credit to him. All Brederodes have been brave, since the days of the Water Beggar. But I'm afraid he's quite aware of that, and all his other perfections. He *is* rather conceited, and as for obstinacy —— "

Then at last Nell had something to say for herself. "Doesn't it strike you," she asked with elaborate sweetness, "that a person may have self-respect and firmness without being either obstinate or conceited?"

"Well!" exclaimed Robert, in the pause which followed, "that's the first time I've ever heard you defend Rudolph, Cousin Helen."

"He has proved himself such a faithful skipper that it's my duty, as the owner of the boat, to defend the good qualities which have served us best," replied Nell, looking so brilliantly pretty, with her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, that I felt there might still be consolations in life for me, if only I could attain them.

The situation was now becoming strained on all sides. Not that it was made so by the conversation I have just set down, but by the peculiar relations of several persons in the party.

The original plan of the Robert-Menela-Twins visit was that, having arrived at Utrecht, they should be taken on by us to Rotterdam, before "Mascotte" and "Waterspin" bore us northward again to Zeeland. This roundabout way of journeying was the penalty of our beautiful day on the Vecht; because, to see the Vecht after Utrecht, we were obliged to land at Amsterdam; and as there was no nearer way of reaching Zeeland than by passing Rotterdam, we were not going out of our way in landing the van Buren party so near home. But to

go by canal from Amsterdam to Rotterdam would take us one long day; and as we had a pair of severed lovers among us, that long day's association, on a small boat, would be awkward.

The obvious thing was for Robert to invent a pretext and vanish. But Robert, no doubt, had his own reasons for wishing to stay, and besides, he had the excuse that he could not go without taking his sisters. If his sisters went, they could not well leave the friend they had brought with them; neither did it seem practicable for her to depart in their company as she had just jilted their brother, who would have to act as escort for all three. This difficulty must have presented itself to Freule Menela, for she gave no indication of a desire to leave us. Perhaps she thought it better to endure the ills she knew than fly to others she knew not; and by way of accustoming herself to those ills, she kept unremittingly near me, when, after dinner, we assembled in "Aunt Fay's" inevitable sitting-room.

If I were a woman I should have been on the verge of hysterics, but being handicapped by manhood, I merely yearned to bash some one on the head as a relief to my feelings; and lest that some one should be Freule Menela, at last I got to my feet and announced my intention of taking a walk in the rain.

"What wouldn't I give to go with you!" exclaimed the young lady. "It's so close here, and I've had no exercise today. I am fond of walking in the rain."

"I will chaperon you," said the L.C.P.

"Oh, we need not trouble you, Lady MacNairne," protested Menela. "It might give you rheumatism; and girls in Holland are allowed to be very independent."

My heart sank. How could even the ever resourceful L.C.P. get round that sharp corner?

She was equal to it. "You are very considerate," she re-

plied, "but I am old-fashioned and used to *Scotch* ways; and in Scotland even *elderly* persons like myself are used also to walking in the rain, otherwise we should seldom walk at all. Indeed, we rather like rain, in pleasant company."

With this, she got up briskly, and it was as a trio that we had our wet walk through the streets of Amsterdam.

The shops were still bright, however, and I stopped my two companions under their dripping umbrellas, in front of a window blazing with a display of jewelry.

"Now, what should you say was the most beautiful thing of the lot?" I asked.

"That ring," promptly answered Menela, pointing to a pigeon-blood cabuchon ruby, of heart shape, set with clear white diamonds.

It was a ring for a lover to offer to his lady.

"You are right," agreed the L.C.P. "There's nothing else in the window to touch that."

"Let's go in and buy it, then," I said. "I have a friend to whom I should like to make a little present."

"Little present!" echoed Menela. "It will cost you three thousand gulden at the least."

"That is not too costly, considering everything," said I, mysteriously. And I was bubbling with malicious joy, as, by right of purchase, the ring became mine. "Each one of them considers it as good as hers," I said to myself. "To-morrow evening, at Rotterdam, if I am safely spared from Freule Menela, and she is gone out of my life forever, that ring may change hands; but it won't go to The Hague."

I dreamed all night that I was pursued by Robert's escaped fiancée, and dodging her, ran into the arms of Sir Alec MacNairne, who denounced me fiercely as a murderer. Nor was there much relief in awaking; for I knew that in her room, divided from me only by a friendly wall or two, Freule Menela lay planning how to trap me.

"If I am to be saved," I said to myself, "I'm afraid it won't be by my own courage or resource. I must look to my aunt. She fought for me nobly all day; but there are still twelve hours of danger. With her and Menela it's a case of Greek meeting Greek. Will she be clever enough to pull me through?"

It was a ring for a lover to offer to his lady

XXXII

I KNEW I looked haggard, and hoped I looked interesting, when I appeared in the big hall of the hotel after breakfast in the morning, ten minutes before the time at which we were to start for Rotterdam.

There were the twins, talking to Nell. There was Brederode, studying a map of the waterways; there was the L.C.P. teaching Tibe a trick which for days he had been mildly declining to learn; there were Phyllis and the Viking wrapt in each other in the seclusion of a corner. But where was Freule Menela?

I asked the question aloud, and self-consciously.

"She's gone," announced the lady who is not my aunt.

"Gone?" I echoed.

"Yes, home to The Hague. She had a telegram, and was obliged to leave at once, by the first train, instead of waiting to travel slowly with us."

"Oh!" said I; adding, hypocritically, "What a pity!"

The small and rather pretty mouth of the L.C.P. arched upward, so I suppose she smiled.

"Yes, isn't it?" said she.

Nobody else spoke, but I felt that the silence of Robert and the twins was more eloquent than words.

When I had overcome the first giddy rapture of returning life, and was sure that I was steady on my feet, I dared to dally with the subject. I asked if bad news had come for Freule Menela, expressed devout relief that it had not, and piped regret at being deprived of a farewell.

"She left a message," explained the L.C.P. "I saw her

off — as was my duty, since she did not care to disturb dear Nell, so early in the morning. You see, I alone was in her confidence. I knew, last night, after you had all gone to bed, that the telegram *might* come, and I promised if it did, to go with her to the station. Remind me to give you the message — when we've started."

As she said this, I felt instinctively that I should have seen deep meaning in her eyes, were they not hidden by their blue glasses; and curiosity to know the worst battled with reluctance to hear it. Perhaps it was well that at this moment Alb gathered us for a start, and that there was no chance for private conversation in the carriage, which took Nell, one of the twins, and the Chaperon with me to the Rowing and Yachting Club, where "Mascotte" and "Waterspin" awaited us. This respite gave me time to get on my armor, and fasten up several, if not all the buckles — some of which I realized were lamentably weak.

On board, there was the usual business of putting our belongings to rights after an absence on shore; and when I came on to "Mascotte" from "Waterspin," already Amsterdam — with its smoke cloud and widespreading mass of buildings, like gray bubbles against the clear sky — was sinking out of sight. We were teuf-teufing comfortably along a modest canal, leading us southward, and Alb was explaining to the L.C.P. and the van Buren girls that, to reach Rotterdam by the shortest way, he meant to avoid the places we had seen: Aalsmeer, with its menagerie of little tree-animals, and the great Haarlemmer-meer Polder. Suddenly, as the motor's speed increased, after taking me on, Phyllis left Robert and Nell, to come to my side. A look from her beautiful eyes warned me that something interesting was due, and by one accord, we moved as far as possible from our friends.

"Best of brothers," she whispered; "I've been dying to thank you. At last my chance has come. You are wonderful!

You *said* you would, you know, and that I was to trust you; but I never thought you *could*. How did you do it?"

"With my little hatchet," I answered dreamily.

Her eyes opened wide. "Your — what?"

"It needed a sharp instrument," said I. "But how did you know it was mine?"

"You were with her so much, and had so many private talks. I felt you had a plan. But I could only *hope*, not expect. Do tell me everything."

"Suppose you tell *me* everything," I bargained. "We may be playing at cross purposes. What has happened to you?"

"I'm engaged," said Phyllis. "Isn't it glorious?"

"I don't know that I should go so far as to say that," I replied, wondering why my heart was not aching harder.

"Perhaps, then, you've never been in love?" she suggested. "Oh, haven't I? I've been in nothing else lately — except hot water."

"You do say such odd things. But I bless you, if I can't understand you. You've made me *so* happy."

"You didn't tell me you were in love with Robert."

"Of course not — *then*. It would have been too bold, even to tell myself, when — he was engaged to some one else. But pity's akin to love, isn't it? And there was no harm in pitying him because he was bound to a — a *creature*, who could never deserve his love."

"Even if he hadn't given it to you."

"That was *fate*, wasn't it? But if it hadn't been for my clever brother, we could never have belonged to each other."

"Some men are born brothers, some achieve brotherhood, others have it thrust upon them," I muttered. "You and he had better take advantage of the lull to be married," I said aloud.

"The lull?"

"In Freule Menela. She'll be hailing and thundering and lightning soon."

"Oh, do you think she'll try to get Robert back again?" gasped Phyllis.

"Unless another and riper fruit drops into her mouth."

"As if it would! You frighten me. Robert did beg last night that I'd marry him almost at once, and not go back to England — unless — on our honeymoon. I told him I wouldn't think of such a thing. But — perhaps — oh, we *couldn't* lose each other now. I do believe we were made for one another."

"I begin to believe so, too," said I.

And as that belief increased, so decreased the pain of my loss. Phyllis still is, and ever will be, a Burne-Jones Angel; and when, with her sleeves rolled up, she makes cake in the six-foot-by-six kitchen of "Waterspin," among the blue china and brasses, she is enough to melt the heart of Diogenes. Nevertheless, I cannot break mine at losing a girl who was born for a Robert van Buren. After all, Nell is more bewilderingly beautiful, and has twice Phyllis's magnetism. She has too fine a sense of humor to fall in love with a man's inches and muscles. That one speech of Phyllis's taught me resignation, and showed me in a flash that, despite her charms, she is somewhat early Victorian.

I glanced toward Nell, on whose brilliant face indifference to her good-looking cousin was expressed, as she stood talking to him — probably about himself — and wondered how, for a little while, my worship could have strayed from her to Phyllis. A girl born for Robert van Buren! — A sense of calm, beatific brotherliness stole through my veins. Nell had never been so lovely or so lovable, and I resolved to find out from my sister if she still thought there might be hope for me in that direction.

"I shouldn't keep Robert waiting," I went on, without a

pang. "There's no telling what Freule Menela mightn't do. She's clever — as well as spiteful."

"And poor Robert is so honorable," sighed Phyllis. "If he'd known that you were working to — to free him, he might have felt it was a plot, and have refused to accept his release. You don't think I ought to tell him, do you?"

"Certainly not," said I. "That's our secret."

"How good you are! Well, I'll take your advice. Yet it does seem so strange — to be married, and live in Holland, when I never thought that anything could be really nice out of England. But Robert seems to me exactly like an Englishman: that's why I love him so dreadfully."

"And I suppose you seem to him exactly like a Dutch girl: and that's why he loves you so dreadfully," was the answer in my mind; but I kept it there. It might have dashed Phyllis's happiness to realize this truth.

"If I let Robert make arrangements for our marriage almost at once, Freule Menela couldn't get him back, could she, for he would be more bound to me than he ever was to her," said my sister.

"In that line alone lies safety," I replied. "Have you told Miss Van Buren — your stepsister, I mean?"

"Oh yes, as soon as it happened, of course. Nell and I never have secrets from each other — at least, we haven't till lately. I thought she would have guessed, but do you know, she *didn't?* She fancied, from things I'd said, that I was making up my mind to — that is, to try and learn to care for *another person.* She disapproved of my doing that, it seems, which is the reason she's been so odd. Not that she didn't consider us suited to each other — the other one and I — but she thought, with all his faults, he was so much of a man that it wasn't fair for a girl to accept his love if she had to try and learn to care for him simply because he happened to be *there.* I see now, in the light of this new happiness, that she was

quite right. But I didn't dream then, that the one man I could *really* care for, could ever be more to me than a dear friend. And a girl feels so humiliated to be thinking of a man who's engaged to some one else. She gets the idea that the best thing would be to occupy her mind with another man, if there's anybody who likes her very much. And Lady MacNairne has always been hinting this last fortnight — but, oh no, I'm not thinking what I'm saying! Even though you are my brother, I've no right to tell you that."

"Sister, I insist that you shall tell me," I said, with all my native fierceness. And Phyllis is not a girl to rebel, if a male person commands.

"Well, then — but she is perhaps mistaken. I hope now that she *is*."

"In thinking what?"

"That — that Jonkheer Brederode cares more for me than for Nell."

"I wonder," said I.

"Oh course," went on Phyllis modestly, "Nell's a hundred times prettier and more interesting than I am (though, thank goodness, Robert doesn't think so), but she snubbed the Jonkheer so dreadfully at first, and then, after she'd changed and been nice to him for a day or two, she got worse than ever. At least, she hardly ever speaks to him at all. She just keeps out of his way, and leaves him to — others. So his self-respect may have been hurt (I can't say vanity as I might with some men, because Jonkheer Brederode isn't a bit vain, though he has a right to be) and he may have turned his thoughts toward one who sympathized with him. Several little things lately have looked as if it were so; but I do pray it's not, now that I'm so happy. It would be too hard if he were to bear a double disappointment, after the trouble he has taken, and the sacrifices he has made — leaving his beautiful home and all its luxuries, and the friends who appreciate him as a

splendid fellow and a grand sportsman, to be skipper week after week on this little boat."

"You forget that he has had the privilege of *my* society," I reminded her.

"Oh yes, I know you must be great chums, or he wouldn't have come. But Robert says —— "

"What does Robert say ?"

"Nothing. Only that he and Jonkheer Brederode have known each other so long, he thinks it odd never to have heard him mention your name as his friend."

"Alb is singularly reserved," I remarked.

"So I said to Robert, and he admitted it. But it was rather a coincidence that he wanted to know us, wasn't it ? However, I suppose your friendship must have made up to him for everything he's suffered. I did dread his learning about Robert and me, for fear it might hurt him, and Robert did too, a little; for Robert is so adorably foolish, he thinks every one must care for me. But he told him this morning."

"What did Alb say ?" I asked.

"He congratulated Robert as sweetly as possible; but Robert said his face changed when he heard the news. I didn't dare to look up when the Jonkheer came and made me nice wishes, for fear he might be looking sad; and there *was* a heavy sound in his voice, I thought. Oh dear, life's very complicated, isn't it ?"

"Yes," I admitted. "Even in Holland."

Perhaps these women are right. Perhaps Alb's heart has been caught in the rebound; but, lest it hasn't, and he undertakes to cut me out with Nell, it is necessary that I lose no time in using my best wiles with her.

While Phyllis was hanging in the balance, she was as desirable as a rosy apple just out of reach; but now that she is smugly satisfied to be in the hands of another her ethereal charm is fled.

"I must congratulate van Buren," I said, "or he will believe I'm jealous."

So I shook hands with the Viking, having blessed the pair, and was in the act of annexing Nell when the alleged Lady MacNairne found it convenient to give me Freule Menela's message.

"You wanted to hear it, didn't you?" she asked, when Nell had drifted away to the twins, whose society, though not enlivening, she apparently preferred to poor Alb's.

"I've waited so long, that I could have waited a little longer," I said, following the copper-gold head with wistful eyes.

"This is your gratitude!" exclaimed the L.C.P. "You don't seem to realize that I've saved you."

I looked at her, only to be baffled as usual by the blue barrier of glass.

"You don't deserve all the trouble I've taken," she went on. "Or that I should tell you anything about it. Come, Tibe, let's go below. Darling doggie, you've spoiled me for everybody else. *You* are always appreciative. Nobody else is."

"You think that, because he happens to have a tail to wag, and others haven't," said I. "I consider myself as good as Tibe, any day, though handicapped in some ways. I'll soon show you that I'm not ungrateful, when you've let me know exactly what cause I have for gratitude. Have you murdered the late fiancée, and thrown her out of your hotel window into the canal?"

"I've got rid of her just as effectively," returned the L.C.P. "I went and talked to her in her room last night, when she was undressing. Ugh! but she was plain in her wrapper. It was a pink flannellet one. Imagine it, with her skin."

"I'd rather not," said I.

"If it weren't for me, probably you'd often have had to see her in it. Well, I made an excuse that she'd looked tired, and

complained of the noise under her windows preventing her sleeping. I offered her some trional, and then — I just lingered. She thought it wise to be nice to — *your* aunt, and I turned the conversation to you. She said you were charming. I said you would be, if you hadn't such a terrible temper. I said you were almost mad with it sometimes, when you were a little boy. Yes, I did, really — you ought to thank me. I dare say you *were* a horrid little boy. But she didn't seem to mind that much. She told me that she got along splendidly with bad-tempered people: they were always nice to her. That discouraged me a tiny bit, but I hadn't played any really high trumps yet. I went on to say you were very delicate, but she seemed quite pleased at that, although, if she only knew it, she'd be *hideous* in black. She said she thought delicate men were the most interesting, so that drove me to desperation, and after I'd praised you a little, just enough to be realistic for an aunt, I said what a shame it was about that will of your father's. She pricked up her ears then, and wanted to know what I meant. 'Hasn't he *told* you?' I asked. And I was shocked to hear you hadn't, because, I said, it would be more honest to let people know how one stood, the position being so peculiar. Your father had left every *red cent* away from you, I said, in case you married a foreigner; and it was such a blow that she didn't even notice that I'd committed an Americanism. She couldn't speak for a whole minute, and then she asked if you hadn't tried to dispute the will. That would have been no use, said I. It wasn't the kind you could dispute. You often fell in love with girls, not Americans, but you were bound to marry a compatriot in the end, unless you could find a foreigner with enough money to support you. Even after all that she held on to you by the ragged edge. Couldn't you make a lot of money, she asked, with your pictures, which are so famous? They weren't *popular*, I said, and though the critics always praise them, you could hardly

ever sell. 'Besides,' said I, 'he's so lazy, he doesn't paint a decent-sized picture once in three years.' "

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What a character you gave me. It's a wonder she didn't rush to Robert van Buren's door, and cry to him that she'd reconsidered."

"I saved him, too, for Phyllis's sake. It was too late for her to go to him at that hour, or even send a note, as I saw by her eye she thought of doing. I stayed with her till after twelve, on purpose. And the last thing I said was, that I thought her decision not to accept Mr. van Buren so wise, as such an intelligent woman as she might marry any one. It showed, said I, how undeserving he was, that the minute she took herself from him, he asked another girl to be his wife. 'Has he?' she almost screamed. 'Yes,' said I. 'Didn't you know? He is now engaged to Miss Rivers, with the approval of his sisters, and a telegram has been sent to his mother, telling her *all*.' "

This was news worth hearing, and I forgave the L.C.P. the inopportuneness of her interruption with Nell

"Who told you about van Buren's engagement to Phyllis?" I asked.

"No one. But I thought they ought to be engaged, if they weren't, and knew they never would be if Menela weren't got rid of.

"But about the telegram to Mrs. van Buren —— "

"The minute I went to my room, I sent for a waiter, and wrote one, without signing it. I hoped she'd think it came from her son, and that, in his excitement, he'd forgotten to put his name."

"She'll be furious," said I. "Freule Menela told me — and probably it's true — that her future mother-in-law had done everything she could to bring about the match."

"Perhaps. But she's tremendously proud of Robert, so the twins say. Once she knows that Menela deliberately threw

him over, she'd never want him to have anything to do with the girl again. And Phyllis Rivers isn't penniless, you know. You've paid a generous half of the expenses of this trip, for which, it seems, some money she'd had left to her was to be used. She's kept most of that; and she has about a hundred and fifty pounds sterling a year besides. She'll have enough for pocket-money, when she and Robert are married; and she comes of very good people: her great-great-grandfather was a viscount, or baron, or something. That will appeal to old lady van Buren, when she finds it out."

"And if Nell should happen to marry a rich man, he would be charmed to do something for the sweet little stepsister," I added.

The L.C.P. turned on me shrewdly. "You seem to be very sure of that. I suppose you judge him by *yourself*. You think Nell's husband may be a rich *American?*"

"I hope so," said I. "And a generous one. But talking of generosity — I promised to prove to you that I am no less grateful than Tibe, though I may not have as effective ways of showing it. Strange little stage-aunt of mine, I *do* thank you for saving me. I *do* realize that, if it weren't for you, Freule van der Windt at all events, would have secured a rich American husband, no matter what Miss Van Buren's luck may be. I do realize that, but for your fibs and fancies, I should have been a lost man, for certainly I should not have been equal to saving myself from that woman. By this one night's work alone, if by nothing else, you've more than earned your aunt-salary and extras. That ring you helped me choose last night —— "

"Don't go on," she cut me short. "Didn't I tell you the other day when you were offering me a bribe, that I didn't want anything, and wouldn't have it — not a diamond ring, a pearl ring — nor even a ruby ring. I know you think me a mercenary little wretch, and that you've put up with me all

this time only because you couldn't do without me; while as for you, of course you're only an *episode* in my life. Still, I'd like you to understand that I haven't done this thing for what I could get out of it. I've done it — for you. Please remember that, when you're counting up how much I've cost you on this trip. Count what I've saved you, too."

"By Jove, I'm not likely to forget *that!*" said I. "If the thing had ended by *my* being the fiancé — it doesn't bear dwelling on. But I want you to have the ring. I saw, all yesterday afternoon and evening, what you were up to on my behalf, and I bought the ring on purpose to give to you, if you pulled me through, as I half thought you would."

"It was born and bred for an engagement ring," she said. "Give it to — the girl you're going to marry."

"I haven't asked her yet."

"You mean to, I suppose."

"I suppose so. But she may not accept me. Do you think she will?"

"If I have an opinion, I'm not going to tell you. Only — keep your ring."

So I had to keep it. And all day, while again we passed flowery Boskoop (not so flowery now) quaint Gouda, and the other little towns which carried me back in mind to the beginning of our trip, I wondered and puzzled over the change in that lady of mystery, the L.C.P.

XXXIII

WE slept in Rotterdam, at the old hotel in the park where the Angels were staying when first they came into my life.

The next day was a memorable one in van Buren annals, for the new fiancée was to be received as such, into the bosom of the family.

Robert and the twins had left us on our arrival in Rotterdam, for the town house is still closed for the summer, and the "residence" is at Scheveningen. It was for the brother and sisters to pave the way for Phyllis, and solve (if they could) the mystery which must have wrapped the unsigned telegram announcing the engagement.

In the morning, before any of us had had breakfast, back came Robert in one of Brederode's cast-off automobiles (Alb seems to shed motor-cars and motor-boats along the path of life as most people shed old shoes) bringing a note from Madame at the Villa van Buren.

What it said I shall probably never know, but Robert's too handsome face was a shade less tranquil than usual, and I guessed that, as Nell would say, he had had to be very Frisian before he succeeded in persuading his still more Frisian mother that Phyllis Rivers is a desirable substitute for Freule Menela van der Windt.

In any case, he had persuaded her — he wouldn't be the Viking that he is, if he hadn't; and though by the shadow round his calm gray eyes, it had probably taken half, or all of the night, the note he produced must have been satisfactory, for Phyllis brightened as she read it.

Soon after, the visit to Scheveningen was arranged; but Robert had, no doubt, prepared the girls for the necessity of making it, for Nell and Phyllis both came down to breakfast in their prettiest dresses, looking irresistible. And an hour later, with motor-veils over their hats, they went off with Robert in the automobile.

They were to spend the day, for people in the Hollow Land enjoy their pleasures as much by quantity as quality, especially their friends' society; and I could only hope that a certain wistfulness of expression, as she looked back from the *tonneau* of the red car, meant that Nell would rather have remained with some of those who were left behind.

If she had stayed in Rotterdam, and relied upon me for entertainment, I should certainly have proposed to her. As it was, I passed the day somewhat gloomily, reflecting on the time I had wasted, while I had her by my side. Now, I reminded myself, the trip as planned was drawing to a close. There remained the visit to Zeeland — an affair of a few days. After that, what? Getting back to Rotterdam again, for the last time. Good-bys. Selling the boat, perhaps — at least, Nell used to talk of that in the first days, when the end seemed far-off and vague.

The L.C.P. kept to her sitting-room on the plea that she had "a lot of writing to do," and Tibe was on guard. As for the Albatross, he went off without excuse to seek the friends of his past, with which the Mariner has no connection.

A premonition of the future came upon me. I remembered the Prince in the fairy tale, who was given by the Fates three magic citrons, and told that each one contained a beautiful sylph, who would appear to him as he cut the rind of her prison. She would ask for a drink of water, and if he wished to keep her for his wife he must instantly obey or she would vanish, never to return, even in response to the most fervent prayer. When the Prince cut the first citron, the fairy vision

which flashed before his eyes was so dazzling, that, bewildered, he let her go. With the second the same thing happened, and it was only by the greatest effort of self-control that he preserved the third beauty for his own, eventually marrying her, as a virtuous Prince should.

"Now," said I to myself, "I'm not as well off as that Prince. Being only a commoner, I ought to consider that I'm lucky to have two citrons, where he had three. I've let the first sylph vanish, and if I don't secure the second, I need never hope to get such another present of fairy citrons, for they'll have run out of stock."

The thought of going gray-haired to my grave, bereft of Phyllis and Nell citrons, all through my own folly, made me feel elderly at twenty-seven; and perhaps my day of gloom was not wasted, because, long before the red car brought back the girl I have lost and the girl I have still to win, I had made up my mind to propose to Miss Van Buren before I should be twenty-four hours older.

When Alb appeared, it seemed that he had been among his aquatic friends, tactfully seeking news of Sir Alec MacNairne and "Wilhelmina." But he had learned nothing; and we had to console each other by saying that "no news is good news." There's a chance, of course, of running across him again in Zeeland: but it's only one in ten, for there are other places where he is more likely to be pursuing us, since he lost the trail in Leeuwarden. Or perhaps he has given up the idea that Aunt Fay is on Rudolph Brederode's boat, and has gone to search for her in some other less watery country. In any case, the trip will be over in a few days now; and once the L.C.P. has vanished with Tibe into the vast obscurity whence she emerged in answer to my advertisement, poor hot-tempered Alec may pounce upon me when he likes.

If I can persuade Nell that she and I were born for each other, as Robert seems without difficulty to have persuaded

Phyllis in his regard, it ought to be easy to convince her that a sin for her sake is no sin. Having confessed all, and been forgiven, I can defy Alec to do his worst.

As for Alb, he has had his fun for his wages. And there are many beautiful girls in Holland and other countries, who ask nothing better than to become Jonkheeresses.

XXXIV

ROBERT came on board with us as a matter of course in starting for Zeeland. Has he not more right than I to the deck of "Mascotte," as the cousin of the owner and the fiancé of her stepsister? He and Phyllis were the only ones among us who had the same air of cheerful, light-hearted anticipation at setting off for new scenes, which all used to have when the trip was but a few days old. For them there is no thought of any end, since the tour of life together is just beginning, full petrol ahead.

Even when she was "Lorelei," and had no concealments from the world, "Mascotte" never sped more bravely. Through the wide Noord Canal she took us as unconcernedly as if our hopes and fears for the future were nothing to her. Out of sheer spite at her lack of sympathy, I enjoyed my private knowledge that, whatever happens to her, she is certain to lose her companion, "Waterspin." But she didn't know that; so she jogged on, purring, in blissful ignorance of the separation in store for her.

If Dordrecht had come under our eyes when they were fresh to Dutch waterways, we could not have passed it. Even now, *blasé* with sight-seeing, and preoccupied with private heartburnings, it seemed rather like passing Venice without troubling to stop; for Dordrecht appeared to me more reminiscent of Venice than any other place seen during the trip.

So attractive did it look, as we peered up its pink-and-green canals, that I did suggest pausing.

"It would give us one more day together," I said, "if we

took this for exploring Dordrecht and arrived at Middelburg to-morrow. Why are we in a hurry?"

Brederode laughed. "Ask Robert," he said.

But Robert's face and Phyllis's both answered before the question could be put. I guessed that Robert would have liked to stop the tour at Rotterdam (for what to him are the joys of traveling with a party compared to the bliss of the honeymoon?), but that Phyllis would not cheat Nell of Zeeland, which has always been talked of as the climax of the trip; Zeeland the mysterious, Zeeland the strange, proud daughter of the sea.

"Some time we shall meet again, for you must all join in paying a visit to Phyllis and me. Then we will take you to Dordrecht, and we will all speak together of this day," said Robert.

That settled it, for though Nell is owner of the boat and mistress of the situation, she would do nothing to postpone Phyllis's happiness. Something of the sort she murmured to me as we puffed past Dordrecht; but I could see by her face that Phyllis's idea of happiness is not hers.

"Good excuse to get in my entering wedge," I thought. "Ask her if she doesn't think it a risk for a girl to marry anybody but one of her own countrymen. If she says 'yes,' there's my chance. If she's inclined to argue, try to convince her, with our case in point."

No sooner, however, had I got my blue-serge shoulder closer to her white serge shoulder, as we both leaned over the rail, looking back toward the old town founded by great Count Dietrich, than up sidled the lady who sometimes overestimates her duties as chaperon. She wanted to know about Dordrecht and John of Brabant and the siege, and the inundation that set the town upon an island; nor would she be discouraged when I told her flatly that I knew nothing about it, and advised application to Baedeker.

She lingered, prattling pleasantly of the Merevede, and of the peace and watery silence into which we had passed, now that Dordrecht was left behind. She drew Tibe's attention to the low-skimming gulls, and our attention to Tibe. She asked if we did not smell salt, and insisted on our sniffing actively to make sure; then cried, "I told you so!" when, after slipping under a huge railway-bridge, hanging so high that the train upon it looked like a child's toy, we turned westward and floated out upon a wide arm of the sea.

Altogether, she would not let us forget her presence for a moment, and blandly refused to understand when my raised eyebrows telegraphed, "I didn't hire you for this."

We seemed now to have said good-by to the sheltered coziness of Holland, just as we had said good-by to several other pleasant dreams of the past. On either side the land ran away from us and hid beneath the dancing waves which ruffled the sea's sleeve, so that we saw of it only long stripes of green, which were great dykes, and irregular frillings of red, which were steeples and tiled roofs of houses.

The tide was in our favor, and we moved so quickly that Alb thought we would have no difficulty in reaching Middelburg by nightfall. Large steamers passed us, their decks piled with cargo, passengers crowding to the side to stare curiously down upon us as we rocked coquettishly in their wash. Save for these big floating houses, and broad bowed, coughing motor-barges, "Mascotte" and "Waterspin" had the wide waterway to themselves; and when we had taken a southerly course, to enter a channel between low-lying islands, we were in Zeeland. Still, though we were skirting the shore of the island of Schouwen, it was as if it ducked its head rather than submit to the ignominy of being seen by strangers. It was just as Alb said, "Zeeland was witch-like, illusive, with the power of making herself invisible." The endless, straight lines of the dykes protecting Schouwen and Tholen from the terrible

power of the sea, stretched like close-drawn ranks of devoted soldiers — each stone a knight in armor — defending their liege ladies from an invading giant, hiding the besieged damsels' beauty behind their shields, so that the monster's appetite might not be whetted by their charms.

Schouwen on the one hand, Tholen on the other, seemed to fall apart as Brederode cast us upon the broad bosom of the Oster Scheldt, steering for North Beveland, and told us legends the while of that strange archipelago which has for its arms a lion swimming in deep waters. He told of the yellow-haired Siren, who would sing to lure sailors to her rock because she was bored by the society of the Merman, her husband; how some fisherman one night caught her in a net, and, because she was beautiful, would not give her back to the Merman, though he begged and prayed, offering a rich bribe of pearls and coral; how the Merman swam away at last, cursing the fishermen and their country, vowing never to rest till he and his brothers, with their own hands, had brought enough sand to choke all the city ports.

He told, too, of the tempests which throw on the shores of Zeeland's little isles the bodies of strange mummied monsters, part man, part boat; and of still, clear dawnings when the fisherfolk of Domburg can discern, far down under the green water, pagan temples of marble, and gleaming statues more perfect than any fashioned by known sculptors, even the greatest masters, when Greek art was in its prime. He told of the great dyke building, and how, at high tide, the North Sea beats fiercely on Zeeland's locked door. He told of the inundations, and how Schouwen, North and South Beveland, Tholen and Walcheren, had all been devoured by the sea, only to rise up again braver and stronger than before. He told how the men of Zeeland had fought against the men of Spain in the old, bad days; and it was all very interesting and instructive; but how was I to oppose my frail vow against

such a tide of information? There were no dykes built round my resolve to propose to Nell within the space of four and twenty hours; and between Alb's eloquence and the L.C.P.'s persistence, it dissolved like a Dutch town in an inundation.

Still I was not as furious as I ought to have been. My steeples and chimneys remained above water, and the sky was so cloudless that I could not despair. It seemed like old times to hear Alb holding forth upon the history, drama, and legend of the little country of which he is so proud, and in spite of myself my heart was warm for him. I rather wondered how Nell had contrived to harden hers so relentlessly against those clear brown features, those deep brown eyes, and the firm mouth which is not cold.

"A good thing for me," thought I, "that she has. And if I don't get a chance to ask her to-day, I'll write a note and beg the L.C.P. — no, I'll get Sister Phyllis to give it to her this evening."

I was arranging the wording of the note, after tea, which we had on deck, when, quite idly at first, my eyes dwelt upon a black speck moving far away, in our wake. It amused me to see the speck grow, for at the moment I had no one to talk to, and Tibe was asleep with his chin on my knee. I lost track of a sentence which was shaping itself nicely in my mind and ought to have been irresistible to Nell, in wondering what the speck would turn out to be, by-and-by.

It was growing fast, which meant that it was moving fast, perhaps faster than we. Could it be a motor-barge? But why should a motor-barge be forging out to sea, where no motor-barges or motor-boats of any sort, except racers, had any need to venture, unless they were navigated to gratify the whim of a wilful American girl?

Now, it did not appear likely that in Dutch waters there could be at this moment an indefinite number of American

girls, wilful or otherwise, owning motor-vessels, and wishing to visit Zeeland in them.

If it were not such a fine day, Alb would not have taken the risk with "Mascotte" and "Waterspin," even to please his particular American girl, and if it were not to please her, he would probably not have come in any case. Yet that thing behind us was skimming along too fast to be anything else save a motor-boat. What then was its errand in this wide, lake-like expanse of water, which did not lend itself to the encouragement of promiscuous motor-boats?

It was gaining on us now, for it had no fat "Waterspin" to drag. One might almost think it was following, it came so straight, and — Suddenly my ears and the top of my head felt hot.

I got up, and went to Alb, who was standing silent at the wheel. Before I spoke to him I glanced at the others, to see that they were all fully occupied in listening to Robert talk of the house, next door to his mother's in Rotterdam, which he had the intention of buying "as a wedding present for Phyllis."

"Alb," said I, "just throw a look over your shoulder, and say what manner of thing you think that is coming after us."

He threw the look. "I think," he answered slowly, "that it's by way of being Sir Alec MacNairne's 'Wilhelmina.'"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "you take it pretty calmly." But even as I reproached him, I was conscious of an increase of speed. Alb can regulate this by means of a long lever which goes down through the deck to the motor.

"What makes you think it's Sir Alec?" I asked. "You can't tell yet what the thing looks like."

"Neither can you," said Alb. "You *felt* what it was. It's the same with me. I feel it's 'Wilhelmina,' and I'm going to try and give her the slip again, if I can. But honestly, if it's she, and she wants to overhaul us, we haven't got much chance

weighted down by 'Waterspin.' If it weren't for that, I'd guarantee to let 'Wilhelmina' see nothing but our heels."

"Let's cut 'Waterspin' adrift," I whispered, glaring at poor Toon, who stood steering the squat little barge, with an irritatingly complacent look on his nice face.

"Impossible, my dear fellow. But you don't mean it, of course."

"I'm capable of meaning anything," said I. "See here, old Alb, you've pulled me through a lot of things, since you tied yourself round my neck; pull me through this, and you shall be best man at my wedding."

"Who'll be the bride?" he asked, as I stared back at the following craft, which was now too big to be called a speck. It was a black blot upon the water, as upon my hopes.

"The bride?" I repeated. "Why, N — Oh, by Jove! wasn't she the one *you* wanted at one time? You never would tell which, you know, so you can't blame me."

"Are you engaged to her?" he asked, in rather a queer voice; and I realized how much I was at his mercy, as, fascinated, I watched his brown hand tighten on the wheel. If he liked, he could stop "Mascotte" in mid sea, and let me lie at the mercy of the enemy. *I* could no nothing. Hendrik would obey him, not me. Even Tibe would not seize him by the throat to please me. Tibe likes and respects Alb even more, strange to say, than he does me.

But, to do Alb justice, he was not slowing down. On the contrary, he was putting on speed, as much, I feared, as "Mascotte" was capable of making.

"I'm not engaged," I admitted; "but I was going to propose to her to-day, if this hadn't happened. For goodness' sake, hurry."

"I wonder you have the cheek to tell me that, and then ask me to hurry. Why should I help you to get her?"

"Do you still want her?" I asked.

"More than I ever wanted or shall want anything else."

"Then it's all up with me!" I groaned.

"Do you mean —— "

"I only mean that you can make me lose her. If Alec MacNairne boards us like a pirate, and yells for his Fay, I shall be discovered as a perjured villain, just in the very hour when it's necessary for me to appear most virtuous. Heavens! If this could only have happened *afterwards*. Once I was sure of her, I'd have confessed everything, for I could have made her understand how it was all done for her sake — for love of her."

"And her stepsister," said Alb, bitterly, as he did to the wheel what perhaps he would have liked to do to my throat.

"That was a mere boyish fancy," said I. "I love Nell Van Buren with a man's love. You can stop this boat if you choose to be a revengeful Albatross —— "

"I shall not stop the boat," he said, in a grave, hard voice, which made my tone sound light, almost humorous. "I shall not rob you of your chance with her. If it depends upon me, you shall have it."

I really did admire Alb, as he stood there, not looking at me, but straight ahead, as if into a blank future.

"Do you care for her a lot?" I asked, half remorsefully.

"Only more than for the rest of the world put together. But I tell you honestly, I haven't had much hope lately. I suppose I was a conceited ass to make up my mind that nothing should stop me from winning the girl, in spite of herself. Well, she's punished me — shown me my folly. But for all that, I regret nothing. If it were to do over again, I'd come on board this boat and work for her as I have worked, even knowing as I know now that she'd end by disliking me as much as she did in the beginning. You're an attractive fellow to women, Starr."

"Phyllis preferred Robert," I said thoughtfully.

"Yes. I confess I hoped you and Miss Rivers would make a match: then I'd have had nothing to fear from you in the other direction. But it wasn't to be; and she and Bob van Buren will be perfectly happy. You needn't fear I'll turn against you. Depend on me to do my best with the boat — though of course you won't expect help in any other way."

"Of course not," I said.

"Nor need it, I suppose," he added, harshly.

"Perhaps we may be mistaken about the boat being Alec's," I said.

"We both know we're not," said he. "Still — there's my glass. Have a squint through it."

I took up the binocular which the skipper always keeps handy, and had the squint, as he recommended. It was not an encouraging squint, for, though our follower had not been gaining for the last few minutes, all I could see of her made me more confident than before that she was "Wilhelmina." Whether Alec MacNairne was actually in chase of us, or whether it merely happened that he had to-day made up his mind to try Zeeland, in his quest, remained to be seen; but be that as it might, we were in the greatest danger of being overtaken.

In my agitation and fear of losing all, I could not concentrate my mind upon the thinking out of any stratagem to outwit Alec if he came upon us, and I dared not interrupt Alb's task by imploring him to rack his brains. The thing for him to do, I told myself, was to keep ahead of "Wilhelmina" at any price, especially while we were in open water. Once we could gain the region of canals and narrow cross channels, we might slip round a water-corner and disappear. Anything, anything, then, to keep ahead!

"Run down and tell Hendrik to see that there's plenty of water," said Alb. "It won't do for the motor to get hot. Say to him that we're going to have a race."

"I can't make him understand," I wailed.

"I forgot. Well, take the wheel a minute, then —— "

"I daren't. If I do, something's sure to go wrong; or I shall snap it short off on its stem."

"You are a helpless chap, I must say."

"So would you be, if I told you to finish one of my pictures, perhaps."

"That's true. Well, say this."

And he uttered useless-sounding words in Dutch, which I repeated after him until I knew them by heart. Then I went below and gabbled them to Hendrik, not more than half wrong, for he seemed to understand. But while the pink youth abandoned the operation of rubbing brass with cotton waste in favor of bailing up water, I stood gazing at the motor, praying it to do its best.

It was hot in the motor's den; so hot that it was no wonder the deck, which formed the roof, often felt warm underfoot. Chump, chump, went the engine, sounding stolid and Dutch and obstinate, as if nothing on earth or water could induce it to go faster than it chose. It even seemed to me as I gazed that it was slowing down, out of spite. I longed to feel its pulses with a stop-watch in the other hand, and make sure. Could it be that, after all, Alb had changed his mind, and meant to betray me? No, it must be a trick of my amateurish fancy.

I assured myself of this two or three times over; but when Hendrik came back with a big pail of water, I saw by his face that I had not been deceived. Something was wrong.

There was no use in trying to question him, since I have no Dutch, and he has no English, except "Thank you," and "Good day." He flew at the motor, his cheeks pinker than ever, and I flew up on deck to find Alb in the act of giving over the wheel to Nell.

He pushed past me with a quick, "Don't stop me. I've got

to see what's wrong." And I joined Nell, who looked very proud of herself as skipper.

Every one on deck was alert now, knowing that something had happened, for the first time in all our peaceful watery weeks. They were not yet aware of the pirate in pursuit, or that this day was the one of all others when the motor ought not to fail us: but they knew that, after putting on a fine spurt of speed for some reason or other, the engine had turned suddenly sulky, and was threatening to stop.

"Have I the evil eye?" I asked myself. "Did I 'overlook' the beastly thing when I went below and stared at it?"

"What's the matter?" I inquired of Nell, feeling a certain relief in talking to her, she looked so beautiful and so dependable

"Don't speak to the man at the wheel," she said, smiling, but keeping her eyes straight ahead.

"Jonkheer Brederode says it's nothing serious; we aren't to worry," remarked the L.C.P. from her deck-chair. "I think it's rather fun to have a nice little accident. It breaks the monotony. And it's really exciting, being out at sea."

"It *is* rather exciting," said I, signaling danger, with a glance that swept the water as far back as the now plainly visible pursuer.

She may or may not have caught my meaning; but Robert van Buren's eyes chanced at that instant to fall upon the distant craft.

"Ah!" he observed, in a tone of careless interest, for which I could have boxed his ears, "there is another motor-boat, I believe. It is coming as straight as if it were following us."

I saw the L.C.P. give a start. She looked at me, and our eyes would have met had it not been for the blue glasses. She understood, and knew just *how* exciting her "nice little accident" might turn out to be.

At this moment the motor gave a groan and stopped. As

it's heart ceased to beat, I was astounded by the apparition of a totally new Alb.

Two minutes ago, at most, he had disappeared in the garb of a self-respecting gentleman with a yachting turn of mind. He reappeared in a suit of Hendrik's blue overalls, and, apparently, nothing else, his feet being bare. In his hand were a hammer and a chisel.

"Motor's all right. It must be the propeller that's wrong. I'm going down to see," he explained, no trace of excitement on his face, no hint of flurry in his voice. Alb is a good plucked one, and for presence of mind and *savoir faire* I've never met his equal.

As "Mascotte" had slowed down, and then stopped, "Waterspin" came lolloping alongside. Toon, looking scarcely more flustered than his superior, kept the barge from bunting into her consort, fending her off with a pole. Alb, with a rope round his waist to keep him steady at his work under the water, slid over the side of the boat, and groped about with his free hand under the water-line.

"There's something round the screw shaft," he called up to Robert and me. "Queer thing! It feels like a coil of wire. We must have picked it up in the canal by Dordrecht, and ever since it's been slowly winding itself round the shaft, until now it's so tight that the propeller can't work."

"Then all hope's over," I said, with a meaning which he alone — or perhaps the L.C.P. — could understand. "We're caught in a trap."

"This hammer and chisel will gnaw our way out," he answered. "The game isn't up yet. Good-by. I've got to work in Davy Jones's workshop."

Drawing a deep breath, he dropped down under water, which hid him from sight like a roof of thick gray glass. Then, in a few seconds, we heard a knocking, muffled, mysterious, somewhere below that glass roof.

After a time which seemed long to every one, and an age to me, up came Alb's head, wet, black, and glittering.

"Wish I had a diver's helmet," he said, when he had breathed; and promptly dipped out of sight again.

Once more the knocking came. Alb was working hard and loyally for my interests, and against his own, I couldn't help remembering; but meanwhile we were floating idly, losing precious time, while the pirate gained upon us. Fifteen minutes more of this inaction, and he would be on our backs. I almost wished that he were a true pirate, and that it might be a war of knives and cutlasses, instead of wits and tongues. I could be brave enough then; but as a fraudulent nephew detected with his false aunt, so to speak, in his mouth, what wonder if I felt my heart turn to water?

Twice more Alb came up to breathe, and dived again. The last time all was still underneath the water, and a fear came over me that Alb had knocked his head against something, or got a cramp. But he appeared, spluttering, and announced that he had been cutting the wire through with the chisel. There it was in his hand, a thick, ugly coil, dangerous as an octopus.

"Start the motor, Hendrik," he called, even before he had clambered on deck. "Now, ladies, unless you go below you may get a shower bath, for we're going to have a race with the motor-boat that's coming along — just for the fun of the thing, you know — and I can't trust the wheel to any one while I run down and change."

"We shan't mind a wetting," said Nell, whose eyes were shining with something very like admiration. "We want to see the race."

"I would rather you saw it from the cabin windows," said Brederode; and I guessed at once that he had more than one object in hustling the women of the party below. The L.C.P. guessed also, and headed a reluctant procession.

Now the pursuing Vengeance was not five hundred yards behind, and if we had ever doubted that she was "Wilhelmina," we doubted no longer. I could distinctly see a man's figure in the bow, and would have felt safe in staking any sum that it was Sir Alec's.

Alb, dripping like a fountain-statue, stood at the wheel, and as I had never seen him look more attractive, perhaps it was as well for me that Nell had gone below.

"They'll think me a madman when we come to a lock," said he; "but who cares? I'm bound to get you out of this scrape if I can."

Never was sound more melodious in my ears than the quickening throb of the motor. I felt intimate and at home with it, as with the beating of my own heart. On we went, pounding along at recovered speed, and were well into the channel between North and South Beveland, but there also was "Wilhelmina." Oh, for some small side canal into which we could slip and somehow disappear!

As my eyes searched the waste of green water and the low coasts of Beveland, all unexpectedly to me we rounded a point, and there was a half-hidden town, one graceful spire seeming to beckon where safety lay.

"It's Veere," said Alb. "You're sure to have heard of it: all artists have. But the thing of importance to us now is the canal which begins here, crosses the island of Walcheren and goes to Middelburg and Vlissingen. If only we can get in, and shut 'Wilhelmina' out!"

"Can we?" I gasped.

"Look!" he answered. "What luck!"

I looked, and saw from afar two great sea-gates of a monster lock standing open, while into its jaws poured a train of barges, sailing-boats and small steamers, which had been biding their time outside.

"Joy!" I cried. "We're saved."

"Not yet," said Alb, as we dashed on, full speed ahead, going as we had never gone yet. "We may be too late. Quick, run for'rad, haul down the stars and stripes, and hoist the Club flag instead. That'll carry more power even than the whole Navy of the United States, and I mean to use it for all it's worth, right or no right."

I darted to the bow and changed the flags, fumbling in my haste; then, when the talisman was floating bravely, I hurried back to Alb, who was imperiously clanging our bell with one hand, and steering with the other.

I stood ready with the long boat-hook, not daring to look back and see what speed "Wilhelmina" might be making. Toon was alert on "Waterspin," with a coiled rope in his hand. All the boats were in the lock now, and the sound of our bell, and the colors of the Club flag alone kept the lock-keeper from closing the great gate-jaws. Time was up: we must make a spurt for it if we were not to exhaust his patience. We could see him beckoning eagerly, and with a rush we were at the gates, in the tail of the long procession. It was only as I knew they were slowly, inexorably closing behind us that I could bring myself to look back. There was "Wilhelmina" just coming into sight round the point, Alec MacNairne gesticulating wildly, a figurehead "come alive," and furious.

XXXV

"GREAT Scott, but that was a narrow shave!" I sighed in ecstasy. "He's out of it now."

"He may be out of the lock, but we're not out of the wood," said Alb.

He had slowed down, reversed the engine, and quietly passed into a water-lane between some huge barges, looking not a whit disconcerted by the curious gaze of the barge-folk who wondered at his bare feet and soaked overalls.

"Why, what can he do?" I asked. "He'll have to wait an hour before the lock opens again."

"You'll see presently what he can do," said Alb. "At least, you will if he has any sense. It will be time for us to crow by-and-by — if ever."

I burned to ask what he meant by these ominous prognostications; but he began to jabber in Dutch to our staring water-neighbors. Any stranger would have thought him in the pleasantest mood in the world. He had a friendly nod for the brown-faced skipper of a smoking tug, a few words for another, and smiles for every one.

"I'm telling them that I've a wager on, and begging their kind help to win it," he explained to me, as gradually he pushed "Mascotte" and "Waterspin" through, and ahead of, the other craft. "I'm saying nothing about the Club flag; but they can see it, and they all know what it means. But, to save rows, I'm being extra polite, and, you see, it pays. Nobody yet has resented our getting ahead, though theirs is the right of precedence."

On we went toward the top of the lock, sneaking, sidling,

pushing, here and there thanks to a good-natured, helping hand, here and there thanks to a shout from the lock-keeper to a sulky bargeman. On the lock-keeper the sight of the Club flag had a magic effect, and he evidently intended to make its rights respected, no doubt counting on a five gulden "tip" at the end.

Ignorant of the perils at which Alb had hinted, the time seemed intolerably long as the water foamed in through the upper sluice-gates, filling the lock inch by inch, and lifting its load of creaking boats and tugs. When we entered the lower gates, we could see only the green and slimy wall of the lock; but by-and-by we found ourselves looking over green fields to a picturesque old town no more than a stone's throw away.

Alb's pleasantries and the might of the Club flag had brought us near to the top of the lock, and I had begun to hope that his dark prophecies were not to be fulfilled, when I jumped at the sound of a shout from shore.

The voice was the voice of Alec MacNairne, and turning my head with a start, I saw his tall figure tearing toward us on the narrow parapet made by the edge of the lock.

"That's what you meant?" I quavered.

"That's what I meant," answered Alb. But his hand was on the starting lever, and the upper gates had begun to swing back.

Alb was looking particularly debonair, and taking pattern by him, I turned away from my aunt's husband, pretending that I had neither seen nor heard him.

"Hi, you there! Starr — Brederode! Scoundrels!" he roared at our backs.

"If he jumps into one of these boats and gets across to us!" I murmured.

"He will if he can, but —— "

Before Alb could finish his sentence the first half of my fear was verified. Sir Alec gathered himself for a spring, and

leaping across the narrow water-lane between his parapet and the nearest barge, landed with a crash on the gunwale.

At that sound my heart seemed to stop for repairs; for there were two barges in front of us, the biggest in the lock, and we had not been able to pass them before the doors began to open. Now we could not escape until they had floated out into the canal, and, meanwhile, there might be a little private tragedy in high life on board "Mascotte."

But a Dutchman's lighter is as sacred, Alb has explained to us all, as a Dutchman's house; and when the loud, explosive Scotsman arrived on the gunwale, uninvited and breathing fire, the lighter's owner proceeded also to breathe fire. He swore; his Kees dog yapped; his children cried and his wife vituperated. An understudy took the helm, and before Sir Alec could jump across to another barge, in his pursuit of us, he found himself engaged in an encounter with the skipper of his first choice.

The one could speak no English, the other could speak no Dutch; and in his fury at seeing us slip out through the gates behind the two great barges, he could do nothing but stammer with rage, and try to push past the stout form which strove to detain him for argument.

Naturally, the push made matters worse. Sir Alec does not know Dutchmen, especially lightermen, as well as I have learned to do, or he would have refrained from that extreme — and on the man's own barge. His push was given back with interest, and the last we saw of him, as other boats surged round the scene of the contest, was in a gallant attempt to make a twelve-foot jump, while a stout Dutch skipper and a stout Dutch skipper's stout Dutch wife held on to his coat-tails.

Again I drew a full breath of relief, and I saw by Alb's face that he, too, hoped for the best, for — whatever his private feelings might be — he is too good a sportsman not to feel the spirit of a race.

We were out of the lock, our propeller churning the water, but — again there was a "but." Alb made a dash for freedom by trying to glide between the two immense barges which, alone of all the late denizens of the lock, had refused to give us precedence. But his gracious ways had not softened the hearts of these skippers, nor did they care for his Club flag. All they did care for was to keep one another from getting ahead.

Evidently they were old enemies, and this was not the first time that they had engaged in deadly duel. Ancient scores had to be paid, and a fig for those who came after!

Each glared at the other. Each tried to push his big craft ahead. Crash! They stuck, and jammed, the man at the right, the man at the left, pushing with all his force with a giant pole, each push locking both barges the tighter.

We were on their heels, and on ours was the whole press of boats let out from the lock, surging heavily forward.

Alb shouted something in Dutch. "I'm saying that the only thing is for one to give way, and let the other go by in advance, not both try to strain through together," he explained, when I anxiously demanded to know what was happening.

Both men shook their heads, and grumbled, while from behind rose a Babel of cries and adjurations.

"They won't," said Alb. "They say that they will never give way to each other. They would smash their boats first. If anything happens to part them they won't mind, because it will be fate, and neither one will have given up for the other. Meanwhile, they say they're sorry, but they won't move, and the rest of us must fare the best we can."

"Can't the lock-keeper do anything?" I asked.

"He can swear." Alb smiled; and I believe there was something in him that sympathized with the two obstinate brutes.

"For goodness' sake tell them we'll give each one a hundred — no, a thousand — gulden, if necessary, if only they'll agree as to which is to yield, and move out of our road."

"I'll tell them," said Brederode, dubiously; and a few words passed between the three.

"I knew what they'd answer," he announced, in a moment. "They say they won't do it for a million. 'Every man has his price,' is a proverb that doesn't count with Dutchmen, where principles are concerned. Now, I'm going to try and force a way, but I'm afraid 'Mascotte' hasn't force enough, and if not, it's all up, for here comes MacNairne."

I looked back and saw my uncle-in-law picking his way toward us from boat to barge, from barge to lighter. He had lost his hat in that argument of which I had not seen the end, but he had not lost his determination, and at his present rate he would reach us in about two minutes.

Suddenly Alb put on full speed ahead, and gallantly little "Mascotte" rammed her dainty nose between the two black and bulky barges. But her strength did not match her courage. She got only a pinching for her pains, and, as Alb exclaimed, we were caught.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've done all I could, and don't see what I can do more, short of knocking poor MacNairne on the head with a pole."

"You've been a brick, and I won't forget it," said I. A strange coolness had come upon me with the knowledge that the worst was inevitable. I felt that my small-sword alone could win me through. "All I ask is that, whatever I do or say, you'll stand by me," I finished.

"Have you a plan?" he asked.

"Part of a plan. I —— "

Before I had a chance to finish either plan or sentence the enemy was upon us. I heard him coming, and turned round just in time to meet my aunt's husband face to face as, climbing across from the nearest barge, he leaped over the rail on to our little deck.

At his present rate he would reach us in about two minutes

XXXVI

I SMILED brilliantly at the dear fellow. I sprang to him, holding out a welcoming hand.

"Why, Sir Alec, this *is* a delightful surprise!" I exclaimed. "Where *did* you come from? I thought I had lost you, at Leeuwarden."

So utterly was he dumfounded, not to say flabbergasted, by the manner of his reception, that I had time to spring these three quickly following remarks upon him before he was able to answer.

When he did, it was with a sledge-hammer. "Well, I'm d — d!" said he.

I stared in gentle amazement; then, glancing quickly at Alb, appeared suddenly to apprehend his meaning.

"Why, of course, you must be surprised to find me on a boat with Jonkheer Brederode."

"You lied to me at Leeuwarden," went on Sir Alec. He was never a man to mince words, as I noticed when visiting my aunt. Poor, pretty, flirtatious Aunt Fay!"

I now gathered dignity. My simple delight at an unexpected meeting with a relative (in law) in a foreign waterway, froze into virtuous indignation.

"Really, Sir Alec, I am at a loss to understand you," I said. "I greet you in the most friendly —— "

"Because you're a scoundrel and a hypocrite," said he.

This interruption I scorned to notice, save by proceeding as I had intended to proceed.

"And you insult me. What do you mean, Sir Alec MacNairne?"

"I mean" — he caught me up without hesitation — "that you, though you pretended to sympathize when I confided in you, were in league with Rudolph Brederode to outwit and deceive me in the most shameless way."

"You forget yourself," said Brederode, turning red, and contriving to keep his dignity in spite of Hendrik's sopping overalls. "I have never deceived or injured you. If this were my boat, I should have to ask —— "

"Don't try that on," said Sir Alec, scornfully. "It *is* your boat."

"It happens to be the property of Miss Van Buren, a young American lady, for whom I'm acting as skipper," returned Alb.

"Rot," was the terse comment of my uncle-in-law.

Alb bit his lip, and his eyes were growing dangerous. I had seen that look on his face once or twice.

"And he's engaged to her," said I.

That is, something inside of me popped out those words, and there they were, spoken, not to be taken back. Alb and I looked at each other. He flushed again. But he did not speak.

"Produce this Miss Van Buren," sneered Sir Alec.

"I will," I promised. "But before I do, calm yourself. You are in no fit state to speak to ladies."

"I wish to talk to my wife," said he.

"Aunt Fay is not on board this boat, and never has been," I pronounced, each nerve on edge lest one lovely feminine head or another should pop up from below. I knew well that we owed the extraordinary obedience of the girls to the magnetic influence of that remarkable woman their chaperon, and how long she could continue to exert the charm which meshed them in the cabin, as Vivien meshed Merlin in the hollow oak, it was impossible to guess. At any instant we might hear a girlish voice calling the name of Lady MacNairne. Even if Tibe — but I dared not think of Tibe.

Horatius holding his bridge alone, was nothing compared to me. No one could help me now.

"Pooh! Do you expect me to believe that? After what happened at Leeuwarden — when I trusted you?"

"You trusted me," said I, coldly, "with good reason, and it would be well if you did so again. Kindly state what, from your point of view, *did* happen at Leeuwarden to bring this storm of unmerited abuse upon my head."

"I dare say it would be convenient to you to forget. I met you with Brederode at the Kermess. You seized me and prevented me from following him as I wished to do. Then, when he had got out of my way, you assured me that you'd find him. You said you were not with him on his boat, that you hadn't been together ten minutes —— "

"Neither had we," said I. "That was perfectly true. And I'm not on his boat. As he told you, I'm on Miss Van Buren's. And if I didn't look you up to tell you where you could find Jonkheer Brederode, it was because I thought you would only lose your dignity by meeting him, and do Aunt Fay and yourself both more harm than good. I know for a certainty that Alb — that Brederode hasn't seen Aunt Fay since July anyhow. And why should I let you and your stupid suspicions make trouble between a very good fellow and — and — the girl he's in love with?"

This time I did not meet Alb's eyes. I was looking straight and with a noble defiance into Sir Alec's.

"You are very high and mighty," said he. "But I'm not to be fooled again by either of you. I've been chasing Brederode for weeks in that beastly motor-launch, and I'm about sick of the whole business. I've got him now, and you, too. And though you may both tell me till you're blue in the face that my wife hasn't been and isn't on this boat, I won't believe you till I've searched every hole and corner of it."

"Perhaps I had better go and ask Miss Van Buren whether

she will kindly permit my uncle-in-law to make such an examination of her property," I said, with the ice of conscious rectitude in my voice.

"Very well," returned Sir Alec. "Go and fetch her."

With head aloft, I stalked to the top of the steps which I defy any human being to descend with dignity.

What would happen between Sir Alec and Alb while I was gone, or what I should say when I got below, I knew not. I could only trust to luck. Was it going to turn out in vain, I asked myself, that all my life I have been called "lucky Starr"?

The canvas curtain at the door of the outer cabin, which protects the ladies from the heat of the motor-room, was unfurled and hanging at length. Standing behind it, I spoke Miss Van Buren's name.

All was silent on the other side. But, after a delay of a few seconds, Nell half pushed aside the heavy folds of canvas and looked out at me. Her charming face was, for an instant, within twelve inches of mine. I drew back in resignation. With my own hand I had given her to another. Whether or no she would eventually become his, I could not tell, but I felt that, after what I had done, she would never belong to me.

There was, however, very little time to think of that now. My business was pressing.

"Come outside in the passage a minute," I said, in a low voice, still hearing no sound from the other side of the curtain. "I want to speak to you."

"Lady MacNairne —— " she began.

I put my finger to my lips. "Sh!" said I.

"Oh, did you know she was ill?" asked Nell.

I shook my head.

"She is, poor dear. She had the most sudden attack, just after we came down, and Phyllis and I haven't been able to leave her. She wouldn't let one of us go up to tell you."

"Wonderful little woman!" I could scarcely refrain from exclaiming. "Her cleverness — I mean her consideration — is extraordinary."

"It was her heart," explained Nell. "She's been lying down ever since, holding Phyllis's hand and mine. But she's better now, and I'm not sure she hasn't gone to sleep, for when I heard you call me, and tried to slip my hand out of hers, she didn't seem to notice."

"She wouldn't," I said — to myself. "Where's Tibe?" I asked aloud.

"She's using him for a footstool."

All accounted for and under control! Yes; thrice wonderful little woman.

"We couldn't see anything of the race after all," went on Nell. "Did we beat?"

"That's what I've come to talk to you about," I said, not knowing in the least what I was going to say next. "It turned out," I went on slowly, "that a man I — er — know, was on board the boat we were racing. We beat it, but we didn't beat him; for he's walked on board since we've been jammed by a couple of brutes on barges. Oh, no harm done — don't be worried. The man is — in fact — Sir Alec MacNairne."

"Oh, the nice man we met at Amsterdam, and again at Leeuwarden, when we — we — " She blushed at the recollection. "He's a distant relation of —— "

"Hush! Please don't speak her name or his loud enough for either to hear," I whispered. "I can't explain all to you; but — will you trust me?"

"Why, of course," said my lost Angel.

"Sir Alec MacNairne thinks his wife is on board, and he's very angry with Brederode and me, because, you see, he and his wife have had a quarrel," I vaguely explained. "He's got everything mixed up; and because he's heard that a Lady MacNairne's on this boat, he's been chasing us, full of fury.

He's silly enough to believe that Brederode's in love with his wife, and — I can't make you understand precisely why, without giving away a secret of my *aunt's* — that nonsense of his is likely to work *our* Lady MacNairne a lot of harm."

"What a shame!" exclaimed sympathetic but puzzled Nell. "Can't anything be done about it?"

"Something has been done," said I. "That's what I want you to forgive me for, and — and help me to carry out, for Aunt Fay's sake. Poor Aunt Fay, who's suffering with her heart at this minute! What will she have to endure, if you don't stand by her!"

"I'll stand by her with all my might and main," said Nell. "What can I do?"

"I'm breaking it to you — by degrees. The first degree is, I told Sir Alec that Alb was — is — in love with you."

"Oh — how *could* you?"

"It was fatally easy. And then I said you were engaged to him. That's the second degree; and the third and last is, that I beg and implore you to come on deck with me, and tell him it's true."

The girl had actually turned pale. "I can't possibly. Anything else — but not that," she said.

"It's the one thing to save my poor aunt. Miss Van Buren — Nell — I tell you frankly, if you won't do this, she — I'm afraid she won't much longer be Lady MacNairne."

"Good gracious! How awful!" stammered the girl.

"Tragic!" I agreed. "And for me — but I say nothing of my feelings. You know how devoted I am to my aunt. She'll be alone in the world — with Tibe — if you refuse to sacrifice yourself in this way for her."

Nell's face was now white and set. I felt a brute; but what was I to do? For the sake of every one concerned, I couldn't have the L.C.P. exposed, or be exposed myself, and the trip broken up at the last, in contumely for all.

I hung on her lips.

"Where is Jonkheer Brederode?" she asked.

"He's on deck, too."

"And you expect me to say — before him — that —— "

"He's said the same, already. Or, at least, he agreed while I said it."

"Oh! Well, I don't see how I'm to go through with it. But for Lady MacNairne's sake, I'll — do it. Come, let's get it over."

"Wait a minute," I urged, restraining her impatience. "I must explain a little more, first. After Sir Alec has talked with you, he'll want to come below to the cabins, and everywhere, searching for his wife; for he won't believe, till he's made sure with his own eyes, that she's not on board. If you're willing that he should, I am; but don't tell him that a person named Lady MacNairne's really with us, or I can't answer for the consequences."

"If he comes below, he'll see her."

"That doesn't matter, as they've never met; so long as he doesn't know her name."

"Very well, he shan't learn it from me."

"And he mustn't from Miss Rivers. Will you warn your stepsister, not under any provocation whatever, to speak the name of Lady MacNairne?"

"I will. But why couldn't you have said Phil was engaged to Jonkheer Brederode?"

"Robert van Buren wouldn't have stood it."

"I see. But what about him? It's no use my telling him anything; he would go and do the opposite. He's sitting in the outer cabin, alone, where Lady MacNairne asked him to stay and keep guard over her, while Phyllis and I stopped beside her in the inner room.

"Dear Aunt Fay," I murmured. "If you'll just warn Miss Rivers, and tell my aunt that she'd better be asleep when Sir Alec MacNairne peeps in, I'll tackle your cousin."

"Come, then," said Nell.

And I followed her into that tasteful little cabin which, in the dim past, I decorated for my own use.

Luckily, it is a far more difficult task to persuade Robert van Buren to say something than not to say anything at all; and though he was puzzled, and not too pleased at being plunged into a mystery, I extorted from him a promise to glare as much as he liked at the intruder but not on any account to speak.

"He won't know you understand English," I said, determining to strengthen in Sir Alec's mind, by every means in my power, the impression of Robert's Dutchness.

I had just arranged matters when Nell came back with the strained air of a martyr who hears the lions. We went up on deck together, and a glance showed Sir Alec that no introduction was needed.

"What! This is Miss Van Buren, the young lady who is engaged to marry Jonkheer Brederode!" he exclaimed.

Nell bowed, thankful no doubt that his way of putting it relieved her of the necessity for words.

"You said in Leeuwarden that you didn't know the two young ladies in Dutch costumes," my uncle-in-law flung at me.

"You may have gathered that impression. I certainly never said so," I answered promptly — and truthfully too. "Perhaps I thought, at the time, that the less attention bestowed on the ladies the better they would be pleased," I added.

"You were right," remarked Nell, bravely.

"Oh, very well," said Sir Alec. Then, abruptly, "How's the dog?"

"He's as nice as ever," replied the girl.

Silence for an instant. MacNairne was visibly reflecting. The sight of Miss Van Buren, and her tacit confirmation of my statement, was cooling him down. He is a gentleman,

and a good fellow when not in one of his jealous rages; and evidently he did not wish to distress her, or shake her faith in a man she was going to marry.

"I expected to find my wife on board this boat," he said at last abruptly. "Is she here?"

"No," said Nell, "she is not, and never has been."

"It's your boat — not Brederode's?"

"It's my boat. He is — kindly acting as our skipper. If you would care to go below, and satisfy yourself that La — that your wife isn't on board, please do so."

Sir Alec looked at her, and she looked at him, straight in the eyes, as why should she not, poor girl, having no guilty secret of her own to conceal?

"Thank you," he said. "If I've your word for it, that's enough. I won't go below. Instead, I will bid you good afternoon, and get back to my own boat — if I can. But first — Starr, do you know where my wife is?"

"I don't," said I. "That I swear. I only wish I did, and I'd tell you like a shot. Why don't you advertise in the papers: 'Come home. Forget and forgive. I'll do the same.' Or something of the sort? I'm perfectly sure that would fetch her, for she's very fond of you, you know — or ought to know. She told me once that, in spite of all, you were one of the best fellows in the world."

"Did she really?" the poor chap asked, his face flushing up — not with rage this time.

"She did, indeed."

"Thank you," he said absent-mindedly. He thought for a moment, and then spoke quickly, "Well, Brederode, I'm not sure that I oughtn't to apologize."

"I *am* sure, Sir Alec," Alb answered. But he was smiling.

"Here goes, then." The big Scotsman held out his hand. The tall Dutchman in the blue overalls took it.

"I don't know about you, Starr," said Sir Alec. "I'm

inclined to feel that you, at all events, have treated me rather badly. As my wife's —— "

"I've meant well all through," I broke in hurriedly. "And just now I gave you a bit of good advice. You'll thank me when you've taken it."

"Perhaps I wi l take it," he muttered.

"Hurrah!" said Alb. "The grand pressure of the whole flock of us is forcing the barrier apart. We shall make our way through in a few minutes now."

"Good-by, then, all," exclaimed Sir Alec. "I must be getting back to my boat. The bargees don't mind me much now it's dawned on their intelligence that I'm neither mad nor an anarchist. Brederode, I congratulate you on your engagement to Miss Van Buren. I hope, Miss Van Buren, that you will be very happy. As for me, probably I shall leave Holland to-morrow."

With that he turned his back upon us resolutely and made off, scrambling on board the barge jammed nearest "Mascotte's" side. So he went on, from one to another, until he had disappeared from sight.

"Miss Van Buren," said Brederode, "can you forgive us?"

"It is hard," she said, picking up a fold of her white dress and playing with it nervously. "But we won't talk of it any more — ever. I must go now, and see how Lady MacNairne is."

"Not yet. One moment. There's something I must say in justice to myself," Brederode persisted.

She hesitated. And there was that in her face, that in his voice, which made me realize suddenly that my explanations were not needed. I could trust Alb not to give me away; and, as for him, he had forgotten all about me — so had Nell. And I crept off unnoticed.

The one place for me was on board "Waterspin," and before the barrier had done more than show signs of yielding I crawled over, slinking into my cabin.

"Well, well!" I said to myself. "Well, well!" I said again, with my head between my hands as I sat on my lonely bunk. There seemed nothing else to say.

I stayed for a long time, until the press had broken, and we were going on at full speed once more. Then I went to a window of the kitchen, which Phyllis so much admired, and looked out. I could see the deck of "Mascotte," and Brederode and Nell, who were still alone there together.

"Well, well!" I repeated idiotically; "it's I who did that. If it hadn't been for me — but I don't know. I suppose it was bound to happen, anyway. I wonder?"

Then I returned to my cabin and flitted about restlessly. Soon I became conscious that I was humming an air. It was not, in itself, a sad air; but there was a certain sadness as well as appropriateness in its meaning for me ——

Giving agreeable girls away—
One for you, and one for you, but never (how does it go?),
never one for me!

We were stopping. We had come to Middelburg. I looked out again. Nell was on deck alone. Doubtless Alb had at last gone below to the motor-room, and was exchanging the blue overalls for something more decorous. Would he, even for the sake of conventionality, have left her at such a moment unless everything were settled?

"Mascotte" and "Waterspin" were at rest, and I could avail myself of Alb's absence to find out if I liked. I was not at all sure that I did like. Nevertheless, something urged me to go, and before I quite knew how or why I had come there, I stood beside the pretty white figure. Nell looked up at me, radiant with emotion.

"Oh, Mr. Starr, you were just the one I wanted to see," she exclaimed. "I was *willing* you to come."

"Well, I came," I said, smiling. "I'm glad you want me."

"I want to ask you what to do. I sent him away. You know, we must stop on board till Lady MacNairne's better, so — there's no hurry, and — he had to change. At first he *wouldn't* go without an answer. But I told him I *must* have ten minutes to make up my mind. He's explained everything. He was never to blame. It was all Freule Menela's fault — and mine. Please say what you think. You know him so well; you're old friends. There's no one else I can talk to, and — I feel somehow — I have for a long time — almost as if you were a kind of — adopted brother."

Brother again! Blow after blow; let them fall now, one upon another. I had feared this, yet would not expect it. But I suppose I must unwittingly have been born a brother.

"That's right," said I. "Go on — little sister." The words were getting quite familiar now.

"He says that he has never stopped loving me — dreadfully — desperately — from the very first. But I was *so* sure it was only a fancy, and — and that when I was so bad to him, and Phyllis so kind, he began to care for her instead. Just now, when you said I must pretend to be engaged to him, I was thinking how horrid it would be for him to feel, 'Oh, if it were only Phyllis!' Didn't you suppose he was in love with Phyllis?"

"Never," I heard myself assuring her; "never."

"I'm *so* glad. You're sure, then, that he knows his own mind, that he isn't asking me to go on being really engaged to him just to save my feelings after that scene with Sir Alec MacNairne?"

"I'm *dead* sure," I said.

"You perfect dear! I *do* like you. Oh, wasn't it too funny, — I can say it, now we're brother and sister — he thought I might be in love with *you*."

"Owl!" I remarked.

"And all the time I was so horribly afraid he might suspect

I cared that I would hardly speak a word to him. Besides, I didn't suppose he could be bothered listening to anything *I* might have to say. And I felt quite *sorry* for him when Phyllis was engaged to Robert. Dear Phil, I've been horrid to her, too. You see, she was trying to persuade herself to take Rudolph without loving him, and I just *hated* her for it."

"Oh, that was what you meant, then!" I exclaimed.

"What I meant?"

"It doesn't matter. Well, make your mind easy, sweet sister. Alb adores you — has adored you since the first moment he set eyes on you, and will till he closes them in death. That's my conviction as his lifetime friend. And my advice is, go on being engaged to him until you marry him."

"Mariner, what an old trump you are!" broke in Brederode. And there he was behind me, neat as a pin, in his own suit of clothes, and radiant in his new suit of happiness.

"I give her to you, Alb," said I. And then I strolled away again, humming to the air of the Dead March in Saul, or something equivalent, those haunting words —

Giving agreeable girls away—
One for you, and one for you, but never, never *one for me!*

XXXVII

I FELT, when I waked up on the morning of butter-market-day at Middelburg, as if I had not slept at all, but had listened throughout the night to the sweet, the incredibly sweet chimes that floated like perfume in the air. Yet I suppose I must have slept, for the bells had sometimes stopped playing their one melodious tune, to tinkle in my dreams, "One for you, and one for you, but never, *never* one for me?"

The hotel is a nice hotel, and there is a garden. After breakfast, I was so tired of brotherliness, of beaming at happy couples, and hearing plans about weddings, that instead of going forth to see the famous Thursday Middelburg sights, at which the world comes from afar to gaze, I slipped away and hid in the garden.

Phyllis and Robert were out together. Rudolph and Nell were out together. Both parties conscientiously believed that they were out for sight-seeing; that their object was to behold matrons and maidens in white caps, quaint fichus, meek, straight bodices, and swelling skirts; to admire pretty faces, with tinkling gold ornaments at their temples; to stare at young arms, red under incredibly tight short sleeves, as they bore baskets of eggs or pats of butter to market. How well I knew the whole scene from photographs! — the bell-like figures of the women; the booths in the big market square; and the cool arcades of the butter-market. How well I knew, too, that neither Phyllis and Robert, nor Rudolph and Nell would see anything at all, or remember it, if by accident they did see aught save each other.

"This," I said to myself, "is the end. We may go back to Rotterdam together, if we like. But everything's as much changed as if it were another party. And this, this is what I've slaved for — fibbed for — plotted for! 'Giving agreeable girls away!' Faugh!" I felt as much injured as if I were a misunderstood saint, though, when one comes to look at it, perhaps I have not always played precisely the part of saint.

While I lolled gloomily on an extremely uncomfortable seat, not meant for lolling, I heard a faint rustling in the grass behind me, and Tibe appeared, to lay his head, in a matter-of-course way, upon my knee.

"Where's your mistress?" I asked mechanically. "Have you changed, too, like all the rest, and left her alone?"

"Here I am," answered the L.C.P., as if the question had been addressed to her. "I thought you'd be in the garden, so I came to find you. Why don't you go out and see things?"

"Why don't you?" I echoed.

"Because I didn't like to feel that you were all by yourself," she answered.

"You needn't have troubled about me," I said. "Nobody else does."

She laughed that quaint, quiet little laugh, which suits her. "That's different. They're engaged to each other — all the rest of them. I'm engaged — *by* you."

"Don't let that engagement keep you from amusing yourself," I said. "The bargain's off now. I hired an aunt to further my interests. Every one else's have been furthered except mine."

"That's not my fault, is it?"

"I know it isn't," I assured her. "Don't think I'm finding fault with you. On the contrary, you're really a marvelous being. But Othello's occupation's gone."

"Yes," said she. "For both of us. I retire from aunthood, you retire from nephewhood, with mutual respect, Is that it?"

"I suppose so," I gloomily replied. "Yet I'm loth to part with you, somehow. You and Tibe are all I have left in the world. But now I must lose you both."

"You don't need an aunt," she said.

"No, but I need some one, I don't know exactly who. Robert has snatched one of my loves, Rudolph the other. What am I to do?"

"Come to the house and into my sitting-room, and let's talk it over," she suggested invitingly.

I obeyed.

There were flowers in her sitting-room. There always are. The scent of late roses was sad, yet soothing.

"Excuse me a minute. I'm going into the next room to make myself pretty before we begin our talk; but I won't be long, and Tibe shall keep you company," said the L.C.P.

"You're well enough as you are," I said.

But she went, smiling; and I hardly missed her, I was so busy with my own thoughts.

One for you, and one for you, but never, never *one for me?*

I must have hummed the words aloud, for her voice answered me, at the door.

"Never's a long word, isn't it?"

I looked up.

A neat little figure stood on the threshold between the two rooms, the same neat little figure I had seen constantly during the past eight weeks. But it was not the same face. She had said, lightly, that she was going to "make herself pretty," and she had. She had performed a miracle. Or else I was asleep and dreaming.

The gray hair, folded in wings, was gone; the blue glasses were gone; the big bow under the chin was gone. A pretty young woman was smiling at me with the pretty little mouth I knew; but I did not know the bright auburn hair, or the beautiful brown eyes that threw me an amazing challenge.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"You told me you didn't want your aunt any more," said she.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Don't you remember? I'm Mary Milton. If you'd lived in your own country, instead of gadding about in foreign ones, you'd know who Mary Milton is without asking — at least, you would if you ever read *The New York Meteor*."

"I suppose this is a dream, and that I shall wake up," said I. "I slept very badly last night."

"Don't call for help under the impression that it's a nightmare," said my late aunt, twinkling.

"I have the impression that it's a vision," I answered. "But if you don't explain yourself instantly, I shall die in the dream — of heart failure."

"There's no great mystery," said Miss Milton. "I didn't particularly want to disguise myself, but you advertised for an aunt, and as it's difficult for a girl to make herself look middle-aged, I had to look *old*. That's all, except that your advertisement came in very handy, because — as you'd know if you were a patriotic American — Mary Milton's an enterprising and rather celebrated young journalist making it her business to go round the world for her paper without spending a penny of her own. That was the understanding on which *The Meteor* started and 'boomed' me; for it was my own idea. I wanted to see things, and I hadn't money enough — so I went to call on the editor, and — I talked to him, till he was quite fired with the project. *The Meteor* has given me a good send-off, and I've given it good copy. My adventures — as they look in print — have been sensational, and, I believe, popular. I've been at it for two years, and all America has read me, if you haven't. I've done all the countries of Europe, now. Holland was the last, and I seemed stuck on the threshold till I saw your advertisement. It couldn't have suited better — except for the blue glasses and the wig. But one

can't have everything as one likes it. I've enjoyed the tour immensely, thanks to you; and so have the readers of *The Meteor*. I'm afraid I've teased you a good deal, and spent a lot of your pennies; but it *was* fun! And you shall have your presents all back — every one of them Heaps of money will be waiting for me from my paper when I get home to New York. They're delighted with my work; and then I intend to send you a check for all that you've paid me to be your aunt. I would rather, *really;* and only keep one little thing to remember you by, perhaps — and our days together."

"Did you always send back the money spent by persons you hypnotized to conduct you through the different countries?"

"No. That was different. I — don't exactly know why, but it was. And you needn't look at me so queerly. I've never done anything to be ashamed of."

"I'd knock the person down who suggested that you had," said I. "I was looking at you because I was thinking you more marvelous than ever. You hypnotize *me*. You hypnotize everybody. I suppose you hypnotized the editor into giving you your job?"

"Perhaps I did," she laughed. "Often I can get people to do things for me — big things — if I want them to very much."

"You could get me to do anything!" I exclaimed. "You're a witch, and what's more, I believe you're a beauty. Great Scott! How you grow on one! Can this be why — because you are You — that in my heart of hearts I don't care a rap if Nell and Phyllis are engaged to others? I wonder if my instinct saw under the gray hair and blue glasses? Look here, are you Miss or Mrs. Mary Milton? and if you're Mrs., are you a widow, grass, or otherwise?"

She laughed. "Why, how old do you take me to be? As an aunt, my official age was over forty. But Miss Mary Milton isn't much more than half Lady MacNairne's age. It's as good to throw off the years as the wig and the spectacles. I'm

only twenty-three. I haven't had *time* to marry yet, thank goodness!"

"Thank goodness!" I echoed. "And thank goodness for You as you are. You seem to me perfect."

"But I should never have done like this, for an aunt."

"Certainly not. But to think I should have been wasting you all this time as a mere aunt!"

"I wasn't wasted. I saved you lots of things — if I didn't save you money. Really, I *did* earn my salary — though you often thought me officious."

"Never!"

"Not when I kept you from proposing to Nell Van Buren?"

"That was a blessing in disguise."

"Like myself. But truly, I only did it to spare you humiliation in the end. I knew all along that she was in love with Rudolph Brederode — though perhaps *she* wouldn't have found it out so soon if it hadn't been for me."

"You've been our good genius all round," said I. "And I owe you —— "

"Now, don't offer me more rewards! It was fun wheedling things from you at first; but bribes have been getting on my nerves lately. The play was played out."

"Let's pretend it was only a curtain-raiser," I suggested. "I'd like you to be 'on' in the next piece, in the leading part. Mary Milton! What a delicious name! And *you're* delicious! It's a great comfort to understand why I was never really in love with either of those Angels. You are not an angel — but I'm going to be madly in love with you. I feel it coming on. I shall adore you."

"Nonsense! A man mustn't be in love with his aunt."

"I strip you of your aunthood. But I can't give you up to *The Meteor*. If you go to America, you must personally conduct Ronald Lester Starr. You oughtn't to mind. You're used to looking after him."

I took a step toward her; but she stooped down and framed the ugly pansy of Tibe's face between her little hands.

"Tibe, what do you say to him?" she asked.

Tibe wagged his tail.

While he was wagging, the others came in. Their looks of radiant new happiness changed to surprise at sight of my companion. In spite of the dress nobody recognized the pretty girl with the wonderful eyes and crisp masses of sparkling auburn hair.

Yesterday I would have sacrificed anything, up to Tibe himself, to avoid explanations, but now I enjoyed them.

Everybody laughed and exclaimed (except Robert), and Brederode helped me out so nobly that I would have given him Nell with my own hand if she had not already made him that present.

"It's like one of Nell's stories," cried Phyllis. "Only she used to love to make hers end sadly."

"I should have died if this had ended sadly," Nell said frankly, holding out both hands to Brederode, with a lovely look in her eyes.

"So should I, I'm sure," said Phyllis. "Oh, isn't it glorious that we all adore each other so!"

"Do we?" I asked the *Meteor* lady.

She smiled. "I suppose it would be a pity to make a jarring note in the chorus."

While she was in that mood I took out the ruby ring which she had said ought to be an engagement ring.

"With this ring I thee ——"

"No!"

"Engage thee as my perpetual chaperon."

This time she did not draw back her hand. And I kissed it as I slipped on the ruby.

THE END